

Guarianthe Dressler & W.E. Higgins *Lankesteriana* 7(1): 37 (2003).

SUBFAMILY Epidendroideae, TRIBE Epidendreae, SUBTRIBE Laeliinae.

TYPE SPECIES: *Guarianthe skinneri* (Bateman) Dressler & W.E. Higgins (*Cattleya skinneri* Bateman)

SYNONYMS: *Cattleya* Lindley 1821

ETYMOLOGY: From the Nahuatl (Aztec language) for tree and Greek for flower. Refers to the local name applied to this flower that grows on a tree.²

DESCRIPTION: Showy purple or bright orange flowers with a tubular lip, and tall, club-shaped stems characterize Guarianthe. Flower: Large sepals and petals typically are spreading, the petals more broad and ruffled; flowers are 3 to 5" (7.5—12.7 cm) across. Color commonly is purple, rarely pale pink or white, with one orange species (*G. aurantiaca*), but is quite variable within a population or even on an individual plant. The lip is trumpet-shaped, its whitish base wrapping the small, blunt column. Plant: Tall pseudobulbs (to 18" [46 cm] or more) are cylindrical, but narrower at the base, especially in older plants; 2 or 3 leaves emerge from the tip.

DISTRIBUTION: Four species and 1 natural hybrid grow as epiphytes in lower- to middle-altitude wet forests. Guarianthe can be seen from Mexico to Venezuela, and in Trinidad.

ECOLOGY and HISTORY In 1939, Costa Rica chose as its national flower a stunning orchid known locally as Guaria Morada, "purple orchid". Originally named *Cattleya skinnerii*, the species honors George Skinner, indefatigable explorer of Guatemala. More than 60 years later it was assigned to a new genus, dubbed Guarianthe in recognition of the Costa Rican word for orchid guaria. While the species is widely grown in gardens and even on rooftops, it has been heavily over collected and despite its national status is rarely encountered in nature. In nearby Mexico studies of another favored guaria, *G. aurantzaca*, have shown that over collection threatens the species with extinction. Flowering plants are stripped from their natural habitat already under assault from agriculture, and sold by the basketful as ornamentals. Population viability analysis, a technique to estimate the resilience of plants or animals in the face of threats like hunting and collecting, has shown the population cannot sustain annual harvests of even 5%

of wild plants. Critically, the practice of snatching flowering plants eliminates reproductive individuals from the population, crippling seed production and accelerating extinction. Sale of commercially propagated plants, rather than those stripped from forests, is the only responsible approach to ensuring these flowers continue brightening people's homes while reducing pressure on wild populations.⁵

CULTIVATION:

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Temperature:	Warm to intermediate
Light:	Bright as for Cattleyas usually 35 to 40 percent sunlight or around 3500 footcandles.
Water-Humidity:	Water twice weekly. More if dry. Less during inactive growth.
Fertilizer:	Use a good balanced fertilizer twice monthly decreasing to once monthly during the short days of winter.
Potting:	Use an open mix in pots or baskets.

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References

¹ www.orchidspecies.com

² **Aldridge, Peggy. 2008.** *An Illustrated Dictionary of Orchid Genera.* Selby Botanical Garden Press.

³ **Chase MW. 2006.** Tribe Epidendreae. In: Pridgeon AM, Cribb PJ, Chase MW, Rasmussen F, eds. *Genera Orchidacearum, Vol. 4.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ **la Croix, Isobyl. 2008.** *The New Encyclopedia of Orchids.* Timber Press

⁵ **Meisel, Kaufmann, Pupulin 2014.** *Orchids of Tropical America.* Cornell University Press

⁶ **Withner, Carl L. 1998.** *The Cattleyas and Their Relatives: Volume I.* Timber Press

⁷ www.aos.org