

Paphiopedilum vs. Phragmipedium – Botanical Differences

Both Phrags and Paphs are considered sympodial terrestrials, lithophytics or epiphytes. Paphs can form colonies of plants. Both have elongate, fibrous roots arising from short to elongate rhizomes and erect leafy shoots. The shoot base in both is enclosed by two to four sheathing sterile bracts with 3 to 4 leaves above. Differences start appearing with the leaves. Paph leaves grow in tufts of two ranked (distichous) leathery, often mottled with pale purple markings on the underside. Phrag leaves are arching, grooved, narrow and leathery.

Paph inflorescences are terminal, one to many flowered, the stem is cylindrical, often tapering. The bracts of the inflorescence are folded lengthwise, green but sometimes spotted or striped with purple. Phrags have terminal or sometimes branching inflorescences that are few to many flowered. Other characteristics are similar to Paphs.

The flowers of both Phrags and Paphs are showy, single colored or bicolored with an erect dorsal sepal and a fused synsepal similar in color and pattern to the dorsal. Petals in both are similar, either flat, reflexed or pendant. In Phrags, the petals are very long and twisted in some species.

The lip in Paphs is deeply pouched with pronounced incurved side lobes. The inner surfaces of the pouch are hairy. The ovary is unilocular. Phrag lip margins are often in rolled inward and resemble a toilet bowl. Above the pouch is a shield shaped or triangular staminode. The ovary is trilocular.

In Paphs, the dominate colors of the species are green, brown, white, yellow and pink. In Phrags, browns and greens are dominant.

The genus Paphiopedilum numbers 158 species and about 25, 325 registered hybrids. Phragmipedium has 42 species and 1025 registered hybrids.

Paphs range in South and Southeast Asia from India to the Solomon Islands. Phrags are New World species that range from southern Mexico south to Bolivia and Brazil.