Encyclia *cordigera* (Kunth) Dressler, 1964

[kor-dih-GEER-uh]

**Common Name**: Large-lipped Encyclia.

**Meaning:** Wearing a heart.

From Charles Baker Culture Sheet: Origin/habitat: Distributed from southern Mexico, through Central America, the West Indies, and into Colombia and Venezuela. E. *cordigera* is common in the rather dry, scrubby forests of coastal regions from sea level to 2950 ft. (900 m) on both the Pacific and Atlantic sides of the dividing mountain range. In Central America, it is more common on the Pacific side.

PLANT SIZE AND TYPE: A moderate to large sympodial epiphyte 12-24 in. (30-60 cm) tall.

PSEUDOBULBS: 1-4 in. (3-11 cm) tall. Pseudobulbs are erect, clustered on a short connecting rhizome, and conical to pear-shaped.

LEAVES: Usually, 2 per growth. The leaves, which arise from the top of the pseudobulb, are strap shaped, leathery, and 6-18 in. (15-47 cm) tall.

INFLORESCENCE: 1 per growth. The spike arises from between the leaves at the top of the pseudobulb. It is 6-30 in. (15-76 cm) long, erect to arching, and usually simple, but may occasionally branch.

FLOWERS: 3-15 per inflorescence. Blossoms are 2-3 in. (5-8 cm) across, long lasting, and all open at about the same time. They are very fragrant when in direct sunlight. However, the fragrance rapidly disappears if the flowers are shaded, even by a passing cloud. The sepals and petals are green, heavily overlaid with brown or purplish brown. The lip may be white or magenta. Plants from northern South America and Costa Rica usually produce flowers with white lips which are marked with a small magenta spot or streak in the center of the mid-lobe, while flowers on plants from Panama and Mexico normally have lips that are entirely flushed with magenta.



Natural Habitat by Kew

**Native to**: Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico Gulf, Mexico Southeast, Mexico Southwest, Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panamá, Suriname, Venezuela, Venezuelan Antilles.

**Homotypic Synonyms**

Cymbidium *cordigerum* Kunth in F. W .H. von Humboldt, A. J. A. Bonpland & C. S. Kunth, Nov. Gen. Sp. 1: 341 (1816)

Epidendrum *cordigerum* (Kunth) Foldats in Bol. Soc. Venez. Ci. Nat. 28: 234 (1969)

**Heterotypic Synonyms**

Encyclia *atropurpurea var. leucantha* Schltr. in Repert. Spec. Nov. Regni Veg. Beih. 17: 45 (1922)

Encyclia *atropurpurea var. rhodoglossa* Schltr. in Repert. Spec. Nov. Regni Veg. Beih. 17: 45 (1922)

Encyclia *atropurpurea var. rosea* (Bateman) Summerh. in Bot. Mag. 171: t. 290 (1957)

Encyclia *cordigera f. leucantha* (Schltr.) Withner in Cattleyas & Relatives 5: 104 (1998)

Encyclia *cordigera var. rosea* (Bateman) H. G. Jones in Darwiniana 15: 23 (1969)

Encyclia *doeringii* Hoehne in Arq. Bot. Estado São Paulo, n.s., f.m., 2: 24 (1946)

Encyclia *macrochila* (Hook.) Neumann in Rev. Hort. (Paris), sér. 2, 4: 137 (1846)

Epidendrum *atropurpureum var. laciniatum* Ames, F. T. Hubb. & C. Schweinf. in Bot. Mus. Leafl. 3: 63 (1935)

Epidendrum *atropurpureum var. roseum* (Bateman) Rchb.f. in Bonplandia (Hannover) 2: 19 (1854)

Epidendrum *doeringii* (Hoehne) A.D. Hawkes in Orquídea (Rio de Janeiro) 18: 170 (1957)

Epidendrum l*ongipetalum* God.-Leb. in Orchidophile (Argenteuil) 12: 257 (1892), nom. illeg.

Epidendrum *macrochilum* Hook. in Bot. Mag. 63: t. 3534 (1836)

Epidendrum *macrochilum var. albopurpurea* C. Morren in Ann. Soc. Roy. Agric. Gand 2: 365, t. 86 (1846)

Epidendrum *macrochilum var. roseum* Bateman in Orchid. Mexico Guatemala: t. 17 (1840)

Limodorum *purpureum* Lour. ex Steud. in Nomencl. Bot., ed. 2, 2: 46 (1841)

Epidendrum *longipetalum* Lindl. & Paxton in Paxton's Fl. Gard. 1: 149 (1850), nom. illeg.

The American Orchid Society provides the following information: Spring ushers in the beginning of Encyclia season and there are many excellent species in the genus whose peak flowering begins around Mother’s Day. One of the favorites is Encyclia cordigera (Kunth) Dressler. Long known as Epidendrum *atropurpureum*, this beautiful orchid ranges from Mexico, though Central America and Northern South America, and reportedly into Brazil. Like many wide-ranging orchids, Encyclia cordigera is adaptable to varying cultural conditions and makes a good subject for hobbyist orchid collections. This species is found in three color forms making it even more desirable.

Encyclia cordigera has travelled a rocky road of nomenclature. Having been originally described as Cymbidium *cordigerum* by Humboldt, Bonpland and Kunth in 1815, Reichenbach erroneously misapplied Epidendrum *atropurpureum va. roseum* to the pink-lipped form, an error that stood well past Dressler's 1964 correction to the current name. To confuse matters even more, Linden published a plate of Epidendrum *atropurpureum var. randii* picturing a white-lipped Encyclia in Lindenia in 1886. Although Linden acknowledged the obvious differences from Epidendrum *atropurpureum*, he went on to say "we have not considered there to be any reason for creating a new species". The plant actually pictured in Lindenia is a distinct Brazilian species, Encyclia randii, and the epithet "randii" should never be applied to Encyclia cordigera. Yet even today, semi-alba plants of our subject can still be found in the trade labeled as Encyclya *cordigera var. randii*. The third color form lacks any anthocyanin pigment and is less commonly seen. Withner describes plants with green petals and sepals and clear white lip as Encyclia *cordigera forma leucantha*, although in the trade they are usually labelled as var. alba. Major databases only accept Encyclia *cordigera* (Kunth) Dressler and relegate the color forms as synonyms.

Many consider the large showy flowers of Encyclia *cordigera* to be the finest in the genus. They have an intoxicating fragrance that varies slightly from plant to plant, but some say the pink-lipped flowers smell like roses. Flowers can last for well over a month. The species has received over 40 AOS awards, both for quality and for culture. The best flowers have a broad, flat, skirt-shaped lip with saturated color for the pink-lipped form, and a well-defined magenta central splotch for the semi-albas. Encyclia *cordigera* has been used as a parent both within the genus and with other members of the Cattleya alliance to create intergeneric hybrids such as the legendary Epicattleya (syn. Catyclia) Florida, registered by Lewis Vaughn in 1965 (Cattleya *dowiana* x Enc. *cordigera*).

Encyclia *cordigera* is easy to grow under a wide range of conditions. Its natural habitats are low-elevation oak forests that are fairly dry and bright. It can be grown in the intermediate temperature range but will do equally well in warmer conditions. The best flowering will occur if plants are grown bright but they will grow and flower under as little as 2000-foot candles. Plants can be potted in a coarse open media but if you have a tendency to overwater, a mount or basket is a preferable option and will maintain healthy roots better. This species does not tolerate stale, dank potting media. The tightly clustered pseudobulbs can be as big as an onion on healthy plants but a mature plant does not take up much space and can be accommodated even in small collections. Like all encyclias, be alert for scale between those tightly packed pseudobulbs. It can get well established before you notice, and then it is more difficult to eradicate. Keeping dry sheaths peeled away makes inspection easier. - AOS Publications Committee

A close-up of a purple flower

Description automatically generated

Encyclia *cordigera* ‘Cariads Nubien’

Photograph by Stewart Orchids

Close-up of a white flower

Description automatically generated

Encyclia *cordigera* h.f. alba ‘Henrique’ HCC/AOS, 78 points, 1990

Photograph by Fred Clarke

Close-up of a white flower

Description automatically generated

Encyclia *cordigera*

Photography by Phil Nelson

**AOS Awards:**

Encyclia *cordigera*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | FCC | AM | HCC | AQ | JC | CCM | CCE | CHM | CBM | CBR | TOTAL |
| AOS | 4 | 24 | 9 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 53 |
| Years Awarded | 2013  -  2022 | 1977  -  2022 | 1981 - 2008 | - | 1971 - 2006 | 1987  -  2022 | 2001  &  2004 | 1988  &  2000 | - | - |  |

Fifty-three awards averaging 15.8 flowers and buds per inflorescences; 5.7 cm. natural spread.

**Hybrids**

Of the two hundred seventeen F1 generation offspring found, sixty or 27.6% have been awarded. Encyclia *cordigera* has three hundred seventy-three progeny. Of the two hundred seventeen F1 generation hybrids registered, Encyclia *cordigera* was used forty-two times as the seed parent and one hundred seventy-five times as the pollen parent. The first Encyclia *cordigera* hybrid was an intergeneric cross registered in 1904, Cty. Distincta (Encyclia *cordigera* x Cattleya *harpophylla*). The first registration of Encyclia *cordigera* hybrids were registered between 1904 to 1909. Hybrids of Encyclia *cordigera* were not registered again until the late 1940’s and continue until the last recorded hybrid registered in 2022.

The Encyclia *cordigera* hybrid that appears to have the most significance is Encyclia Rioclarense (Encyclia *randii* x Encyclia *cordigera*). Encyclia Rioclarense originated by E. Wenzel and registered in 1994 by M. Werther. Encyclia Rioclarense has received fourteen AOS awards: (AM – 7; HCC – 6; and CCM – 1). Encyclia Rioclarense has twelve F1 generation offspring and thirteen progeny.

A close-up of a purple flower

Description automatically generated

Encyclia Rioclarense ‘Silver Creek’ AM/AOS, 80 points, 2014

Photograph by Lois Cinert

Chicago Center Monthly Judging

From reviewing data and photographs from OrchidWiz, flowers of Encyclia *cordigera* hybrids tend to be stellate with fenestration. Depending on the secondary parent of Encyclia *cordigera* hybrids the lip shape of Encyclia cordigera and the dark fuchsia / pink lip coloration and midline lip coloring tend to be dominant. Encyclia *cordigera* installs in its progeny floriferousness.

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