Brassavola, Robert Brown, 1813

[bra-sah-VOH-luh]

The American Orchid Society notes that Brassavola was named by Robert Brown in the early 1800’s, Brassavola is a very popular, showy genus that has been used hundreds of times by hybridizers. Beloved by all from the beginner to the advanced hobbyist to the sophisticated hybridizer, Brassavola, especially B. nodosa, is a must for any collection due to its easy growth habit, flower longevity and wonderful evening fragrance. Commonly known as ‘the lady of the night’ the sweet fragrance of B. nodosa can easily fill a large greenhouse. Although now considered a separate genus, (Rhyncholaelia) B. digbyana was once the backbone of ‘ruffled’ Cattleya breeding, the brassocattleyas (BC.) and brassolaeliacattleyas (BLC.). Nowadays breeding with B. nodosa has become very popular as evidenced by the numerous awards granted to such hybrids as Bl. Yellow Bird, Blc. Apache Sunrise, BC. Binosa, BC. Maikai, BC. Carnival Kids, Bl. Richard Mueller, BL. Morning Glory and a long etc.

The genus Brassavola was named in honor of the Italian botanist, Antonio Musa Brassavola. Species found in hobbyist collections include B. cordata, B. cucullata, B. cebolleta and B. acaulis with B. nodosa being the most well-known and easily cultivated.



Map Photograph from Kew

Native to:

Argentina Northeast, Aruba, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil North, Brazil Northeast, Brazil South, Brazil Southeast, Brazil West-Central, Cayman Is., Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Leeward Is., Mexico Gulf, Mexico Northeast, Mexico Northwest, Mexico Southeast, Mexico Southwest, Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panamá, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Southwest Caribbean, Suriname, Trinidad-Tobago, Venezuela, Venezuelan Antilles, Windward Is.

Heterotypic Synonyms

Epidendrum L. in Sp. Pl.: 952 (1753), nom. rej.

Eudisanthema Neck. ex-Post & Kuntze in Lex. Gen. Phan. 1: 215 (1903)

Javieria Archila, Chiron & Szlach. in Richardiana 14: 99 (2013)

Lysimnia Raf. in Fl. Tellur. 4: 43 (1838)

Tulexis Raf. in Fl. Tellur. 4: 42 (1838)

Accepted Species

Brassavola acaulis Lindl. & Paxton

Brassavola amazonica Poepp. & Endl.

Brassavola angustata Lindl.

Brassavola appendiculata A.Rich. & Galeotti

Brassavola caraiensis Campacci & Rosim

Brassavola ceboletta Rchb.f.

Brassavola cucullata (L.) R.Br.

Brassavola fasciculata Pabst

Brassavola filifolia Linden

Brassavola flagellaris Barb.Rodr.

Brassavola harrisii H.G.Jones

Brassavola martiana Lindl.

Brassavola nodosa (L.) Lindl.

Brassavola ovaliformis C.Schweinf.

Brassavola pitengoensis Campacci

Brassavola retusa Lindl.

Brassavola subulifolia Lindl.

Brassavola tuberculata Hook.

Brassavola xerophylla Archila

Wikipedia notes Brassavola is a genus of 21 orchids (family Orchidaceae). They were named in 1813 by the Scottish botanist Robert Brown. The name comes from the Italian nobleman and physician Antonio Musa Brassavola. This genus is abbreviated B. in trade journals.

These species are widespread across Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and South America. They are epiphytes, and a few are lithophytes. A single, apical, and succulent leaf grows on an elongated pseudobulb.

The orchid yields a single white or greenish white flower, or a raceme of a few flowers. The three sepals and two lateral petals tend to be greenish, narrow, and long. The base of the broad, sometimes fringed lip partially enfolds the column. This column has a pair of falciform (sickle-shaped) ears on each side of the front and contains twelve (sometimes eight) pollinia.

Most Brassavola orchids are very fragrant, attracting pollinators with their citrusy smell. But they are only fragrant at night, in order to attract the right moth. Longevity of flowers depends on the species and is between five and thirty days.

In 1698 Brassavola nodosa was the first tropical orchid to be brought from the Caribbean island Curaçao to Holland. Thus began the propagation of this orchid and the fascination for orchids in general.

Type species: Brassavola *cucullata*.

Brassavola Species Awards

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | FCC | AM | HCC | AQ | JC | CCM | CCE | CHM | CBM | CBR | TOTAL |
| *acaulis* | - | 4 | - | - | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | - | 8 |
| *amazonica, ~martiana* | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | 1 | 8 |
| *cebolitta* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| *cordata, ~subulifolia* | - | 3 | - | - | - | 8 | 1 | - | - | - | 12 |
| *cucullata* | - | 5 | 3 | - | 2 | 4 | - | - | - | - | 14 |
| *digbyana* | 1 | 22 | 10 | - | 1 | 9 | 1 | - | - | - | 44 |
| *flagellaris* | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | 7 |
| *fragrans* | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| *gibbsiana, ~tuberculata* | - | 2 | 1 | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| *glauca* | 1 | 13 | 15 | - | 1 | 15 | - | - | 1 | - | 46 |
| *grandiflora* | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 5 |
| *nodosa* | 3 | 18 | 8 | - | 1 | 28 | 3 | - | - | - | 61 |
| *venosa* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| *perrinii* | - | 1 | - | - | - | 8 | 1 | - | - | - | 10 |
| *reginae* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |

Brassavola Species F1 Hybrids

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Pre -  1930 | 1930 - 1940 | 1940 - 1950 | 1950  -  1960 | 1960  -  1970 | 1970 - 1980 | 1980 -1990 | 1990 -2000 | 2000 - 2020 | 2020 + | TOTAL |
| *acaulis* | - | - | - | - | 3 | 2 | 2 | - | - | 1 | 8 |
| *amazonica, ~martiana* | - | - | - | - | 3 | 1 | 4 | - | 6 | 1 | 15 |
| *appendiculata* | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 6 | 52 | 11 | 88 |
| *cebolitta* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| *cordata, ~subulifolia* | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 7 | 6 | 11 | 23 | 10 | 63 |
| *cucullata* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| *digbyana* | 92 | 10 | 17 | 21 | 30 | 31 | 72 | 32 | 94 | 20 | 419 |
| *flagellaris* | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 2 | 2 | 12 | 4 | 32 |
| *fragrans* | 6 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | 2 | 13 | 7 | 32 |
| *gibbsiana, ~tuberculata* | 6 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 3 | 2 | 13 | 7 | 32 |
| *glauca* | 19 | - | 6 | 4 | 22 | 13 | 14 | 16 | 25 | 3 | 122 |
| *grandiflora* | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 16 | 1 | 19 |
| *nodosa* | 10 | - | 4 | 9 | 33 | 49 | 69 | 64 | 219 | 14 | 479 |
| *venosa* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 5 | - | 6 |
| *perrinii* | 3 | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 13 | 10 | 55 | 6 | 90 |
| *reginae* | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | 3 |

**Brassavola building blocks include:**

1. Brassavola *digbyana* – based on forty-four American Orchid Society awards and four hundred nineteen F1 offspring and nineteen thousand three hundred forty-four progeny.

2. Brassavola *glauca* – based on forty-six American Orchid Society awards and one hundred twenty-two F1 offspring and one thousand two hundred and forty-eight progeny.

3. Brassavola *nodosa* – based on sixty-one American Orchid Society awards and four hundred seventy-nine F1 offspring and one thousand three hundred and thirty-one progeny.

AOS Webinar:

Brassavola: A new look at an old Genus – Beth Martin AOS Judge November 15, 2023.

Brassavola are some of the earliest orchid species cultivated in Europe since the 1600s. They are tolerant of less-than-ideal growing conditions. Brassavola are pollinated by night flying moths. They are fragrant at night. Brassavola produce nectar.

Carl Withner noted, “The problem is in trying to name them all properly, not growing them.”

Plants have creeping rhizomes, large, thick roots for the size of the plant, are terete or semi-terete leaves with a lengthwise grove on upper side. Brassavola may have one flower per growth or racemes with up to 15 flowers.

Characteristics of Brassavola flowers: sepals and petal are long, narrow, and pointed. Their coloring is usually light green, may have yellow to red overlay. The sepals may have faint purple flush or spotting. Brassavola flower lips are large and white, usually pointed, wide, flat expanded section called a blade or lamina, may be clawed abruptly narrowed at the base and wrapped around the column and may have find purple or dark spotting at the base and some yellow or green in the throat.

Kew recognizes nineteen species, including two varieties of B. nodosa: var. nodosa and var. rhopalorrachis. Brassavola nodosa has been in cultivation in Europe since the 1600s.

The genus Brassavola when used as a parent tend to dominate the form of the F1 offspring when used with other genera. Flowers produced from F1 offspring are stellate in shape, have narrow and long sepals and petals with large broad lips. Brassavola species are recessive in color transmission. The dominant flower color of Brassavola offspring almost always comes from the non-Brassavola parent. The Brassavola parent tends to add spotting or other markings on the lip of the offspring.

Brassavola offspring tend to receive hybrid vigor from the Brassavola parent. The offspring of Brassavola parents have an increase in flower count and frequently have multiple bloom cycles per year. Flowers produce fragrance in the evening. Plants of Brassavola offspring have compact growth habit.

The American Orchid Society established the Renee and Marvin Gerber Award in 2020 secondary to their extensive work with the genus Brassavola. The award is given to the most outstanding example of a hybrid using a true Brassavola as one parent. A plant being considered for the Renee and Marvin Gerber Award may be simultaneously eligible for the Masatoshi Miyamoto Cattleya Alliance Award; however, the plant may only win one of these awards.

The following conjectures are made after reviewing data and photographs found in OrchidWiz. The flowers of Brassavola species flowers are stellate, which is passed on to their offspring. Sepals and petals of Brassavola species frequently present not flat and often droop prorate. Brassavola species have a high tendency to instate floriferousness in their offspring. Offspring of Brassavola species are fragrant.

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