



Bifoliate Cattleyas - *Cattleya tigrina* (syn. *leopoldii*)

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

If your orchids do not bloom much during the heat of the summer, you might consider adding some bifoliate cattleyas to your collection. There are small varieties like *Cattleya walkeriana*, *aclandiae* and *violacea* that do not take up too much space and bloom several times a year. Then there are the large varieties like *Cattleya tigrina*, which was called *leopoldii* for years. It has beautiful clusters of flowers held on stems above the foliage. Courtney describes these bifoliate as multiflora cattleyas in his book *American Cattleyas*:

A multiflora cattleya is one where the inflorescence is the focus of hybridizing instead of the individual flower. Typically there are more than seven flowers on a single inflorescence arranged as a mass instead of as a series of individual flowers. While the parent species are usually bifoliate, not all bifoliate are multifloras... Multifloras are separated from all other groups discussed because the form of each individual flower, although important, is not the focus of the hybrid. The perfect multiflora cattleya has a mass of flowers with each flower fully open and barely coming in contact with other flowers in the inflorescence so that from all sides there are no large gaps between flowers. The form of each individual flower should be as closed (petals and sepals overlapping) as possible, given the parentage. The arrangement of flowers on the stem is more important than individual flower form.



*The typical color form of *Cattleya tigrina* (syn. *leopoldii*) 'Mendenhall', photo by Keith Davis*



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Coerulea form of Cattleya tigrina (syn. leopoldii)



Alba color form of Cattleya tigrina (syn. leopoldii)

Photo courtesy of Keith Davis

Greg Allikas has an excellent article on how to grow [Cattleya tigrina](#) that is available to members on the AOS website. Of particular concern is the timing of repotting. You know that the best time to repot any orchid is when it is forming new roots, because it will recover most quickly from the transplant shock when the roots can reestablish quickly and stabilize the plant. Some orchids are tolerant of repotting at less than the optimum time, but not the bifoliate and particularly not the bifoliate species. These should be repotted when the new green root tips are forming, even if the plant is getting ready to bloom. If you can't bring yourself to sacrifice the blooming and repot at that time, there are a few options, like simply dropping the pot into a larger pot or letting the plant grow into a second pot attached to the first. You can also try another of Keith's tricks, as outlined in the article [Repotting Bifoliate Cattleyas - Keith Davis Style](#).



Over the top repotting technique, close-up
Photo courtesy of Keith Davis



Over the top repotting technique, close-up
Photo courtesy of Keith Davis



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Cattleya guttata: Very tall, graceful plants, often with three leaves per pseudobulb and *Cattleya tigrina*: Tall, stocky plants, usually with two leaves per pseudobulb
Photo courtesy of Greg Allikas

Cattleya tigrina has long been known as *Cattleya leopoldii* and before that it was thought to be a variety of *Cattleya guttata*, referred to as *Cattleya guttata* var. *leopoldii*. *C. tigrina* is still confused with *Cattleya guttata*. They both are tall robust plants with spotted flowers, but they have different blooming seasons. *C. tigrina* flowers in early summer from a green sheath, while *C. guttata* flowers in late summer to early autumn from a dried sheath. Courtney writes about their differences when used in hybridizing:

For the most part, C. guttata has not been used with success for multiflora hybrids. Many crosses are registered to this species because the Royal Horticultural Society considered C. guttata synonymous with C. leopoldii for much of its history. Progeny from these two species differ markedly. Most catalogs list hybrids made with C. leopoldii as C. guttata var. leopoldii, but there is no way of telling which species was used once the hybrid name is attached to a plant. Hybrids with intense color are generally products of C. leopoldii, not C. guttata.

In his book *American Cattleyas*, Courtney talks about how hybridizers have used *Cattleya tigrina* (syn. *leopoldii*) in breeding with standard unifoliate cattleyas, as well as to enhance the bifoliate cattleya lineage:

A tact used by hybridizers has been to hybridize multiflora species and hybrids with standard cattleya forms, typically producing far less flowers although still technically multiflora such as C. Portia. Such hybrids are used to increase flower count in future generations of standard forms rather than to produce additional multiflora hybrids. Many of the first generation hybrids that combine the multiflora species and hybrids with standard forms have been magnificent hybrids... When C. bowringiana was matched with C. Nigrella, C. Penang resulted. The best known clone 'Black Caesar' AM/AOS produces a head of 6-10 deep purple four inch flowers held above the foliage. Flowers in this hybrid resemble standard cattleyas in form and substance...



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Cattleya (now Cattlianthe) Penang 'Black Caesar' AM/AOS
(*Cattleya Nigrella* x *Guarianthe bowringiana*)

Joe Grezaffi registered Lc. Allen Condo (Lc. Summerland Girl x C. Mrs. Mahler) to produce hybrids that magnified the C. leopoldii in the background of each parent combined with the characteristics of the other parents to make exceptional and unique multiflora hybrids. Some of this grex resembles giant versions of C. leopoldii, while others add the C. bicolor lip to deep bronze petals and sepals. No two clones are exactly the same, yet all were beautiful in their own right. This hybrid is a roadmap for others interested in continuing and enhancing multiflora forms.



Lc. (now C.) Allen Condo, from left to right 'Joe's Beauty', 'Hackneau' and 'Rosemarie'
(*Cattleya Summerland Girl* x *Cattleya Mrs. Mahler*)
'Rosemarie' photo courtesy of Courtney Hackney



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The big bifoliate cattleyas are not for the faint of heart. They are large, robust plants that can be temperamental if the mix is allowed to become stale. Without a doubt, the fragrant, multifloral flowers have got IT, the wow factor, regardless of whether you choose to grow the species or their hybrids. If you would like to try some seedlings, Fred Clarke at Sunset Valley Orchids and Ben Oliveros at Orchid Eros have some great offerings. You won't regret it!

Citations and Additional Reading

Allikas, Greg. *Cattleya tigrina*, accessed online 8/26/2020

<https://www.aos.org/orchids/collectors-items/cattleya-tigrina.aspx>

Hackney, C.T. 2004. *American Cattleyas: Species and Outstanding Clones That Define American Hybridizing*. Wilmington, NC: Courtney T. Hackney, pp. 123-127.