

Plant of the Month

September
2018

Common Name: Sydney Rock Orchid
Scientific Name: *Dendrobium speciosum*
James E Smith
Family: Orchidaceae
Genus: *Dendrobium* - from the Greek *dendron*- tree and *bios*- life. Refers to the epiphytic habit of many species.
Species: *speciosus*, latin for beautiful

Distribution

Widespread from south eastern Victoria to far north Queensland.

Native Habitat

Grows as a lithophyte on rocks in open forest or an epiphyte in a sunny position on trees in rainforests.

Description

A variable orchid with thick leaves that emerge from starchy storage organs known as pseudobulbs up to 45cm long. As a lithophyte it forms large spreading clumps on rocks and cliff faces, often in full sun.

Flowers

Fragrant flowers occur on arching stems in clusters of up to 100 flowers per stem. They range from pure white to golden yellow with purple dots on the central petal, known in orchids as the labellum. Flowers are seen from late winter through spring and are often pollinated by the native stingless bee, *Tetragonula carbonaria*

Location in Garden

Various. Middle Garden, many cultivars are planted in the rockery adjacent to the Succulent Garden. An old specimen occurs on the sandstone outcrop next to the Boy Extracting Thorn statue overlooking Sydney Harbour. To find more locations, explore our online plant database on your phone or other device.
<https://rbgsydney.gardenexplorer.org>

Information

First named in 1804 from a specimen collected by First Fleet surgeon John White in Port Jackson, Sydney. *Dendrobium speciosum* is considered to be a species complex which includes nine naturally occurring varieties.

It hybridises with other *Dendrobium* species and breeders have created a large number of hybrids and cultivars using this species as a parent.

Popular in cultivation and easy to grow in tropical to temperate climates. It can be grown on branches of trees or rocks but may need to be fixed into position with twine while the plant is establishing a new root system.

Plants should not be planted directly into soil but can be grown in a container in well-drained, coarse potting mix. Flowering is best in a warm sunny location with regular liquid fertilizer applications during the growing season (spring and summer) to promote healthy growth.

The major pest in warmer areas is the Dendrobium Beetle (*Stethopachys formosa*) which skeletonizes leaves, destroys new shoots and flowers. Control is by hand picking in the early evening or for heavy infestations insecticides may be required.



  
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