

# The Orchid of the Month: February, 2014

By Bruce Adams

*Laelia anceps*



This month's "Orchid of the Month" is a bit late, as I was waiting to see what would be in bloom. February was pretty much bloom free for me until the very last week, when my first *Dendrobium nobile* hybrid of the season bloomed, as did *Laelia anceps*. I have lots of *Dendrobium* to come in March (I hope) so let's take a look at *Laelia anceps*.

*Laelia anceps* is a native to Mexico, also found in Guatemala and Honduras. (1) It was imported by Loddiges and Sons nursery in 1835, and described and named by John Lindley, a very familiar name in orchid history. (2) It has been reported to survive temperatures as low as 24° degrees, although in my experience it has died at 26° in my backyard. It comes in many color forms but generally is a light purple/lavender with a darker purple lip. There is an alba form as well. There are, in fact so many different named cultivars available that, if you wanted to have an orchid collection containing nothing but *Laelia anceps* varieties you could have quite a large number of plants. Add to that the primary hybrids using *Laelia anceps*, and I suspect you'd have very little room for anything else!

Typically, *Laelia anceps* blooms in November to January. You'll note that mine is just coming into bloom in late February. Perhaps this is due to the very cold nights we've been having, as well as my dry treatment (see below). I've not had the plant long enough to know if this will be a pattern in the future.

Because of *Laelia anceps*' cold tolerance, it makes a very good candidate for growing outdoors in our Sacramento climate. In the winter, I do bring my plants to a more protected area, by the side of the house under an overhang, with nearby evergreen trees for additional heat retention. When it gets very cold, like this past winter, I hang some

frost cloth around the growing area as well. Except for one frozen flower spike I had no damage to any *Laelia anceps* this winter,.

Another attribute of *Laelia anceps* is that it is also very heat tolerant, and temperatures in the low hundreds don't bother it, as long as humidity is maintained. I like to give it some midday shade to prevent leaf burning, but that has been problematic. Previously, I've grown *Laelia anceps* under the shade of a privet tree, with some additional shade cloth, but I found that it, along with many of my other *Cattleya* type plants, was not getting enough light, and I had soft growth with reduced bloom. Now I grow it under the shade of my *Acacia bailyana* tree. *Acacias* have very finely divided leaves, which allow for good light penetration, but soften the light just enough so that I have not had burning of my plants. I also have a misting system set up to keep the plants cooler, which also serves to raise the humidity. I feed with slow release fertilizer in the spring, and also use Michigan fertilizer every week, diluted to half strength, more or less. I water two times per week during the growing season, about March to September, but as the weather begins to cool I decrease my watering greatly, so that by winter I may water once per month. I have found that my outdoor orchids get through the winter much better with little or no water.

I pot my plants in clay, and use medium to large size *Orchiata* medium. I've often heard that *Laelia anceps* does best when the roots are allowed to hang freely in the air. In other words, that one should not repot just because the pseudobulb has reached the edge of the pot. I am not so certain that this works so well when the plant is grown in lower humidity, but I'll reserve my judgment for another season or two. My concern is that, as an outdoor grower, my plants just don't get the humidity that they would in a greenhouse, even with my misting system. I've seen many a root tip with just a tiny tip of green, rather than the long green tips, one half inch or more, found in greenhouse grown plants. As always, we must adjust all cultural advice we get from any growers, including me, to account for our conditions.

There are lots of cold tolerant *Cattleya* type orchids that can be grown outdoors in Sacramento, and many hybrids have been made between them, creating a plethora of plants that those without greenhouses can enjoy. They survive, and even thrive in our climate, and with a bit of extra protection, you can have an orchid collection that your greenhouse-owning friends will be envious of, especially when they get their electric bill!

Footnotes:

1) Santa Barbara Orchid Estate site  
[http://www.sborchid.com/culture.php?culture\\_title=Laelia%20anceps](http://www.sborchid.com/culture.php?culture_title=Laelia%20anceps)

2) Australian Orchid Council, Inc.  
[http://www.orchidsaustralia.com/article\\_%20L\\_anceps.htm](http://www.orchidsaustralia.com/article_%20L_anceps.htm)

Sources:

1) Santa Barbara Orchid Estate

<http://www.sborchid.com/>

2) Cal-Orchid

<http://www.calorchid.com/>

3) Gold Country Orchids

<http://www.goldcountryorchids.com/>