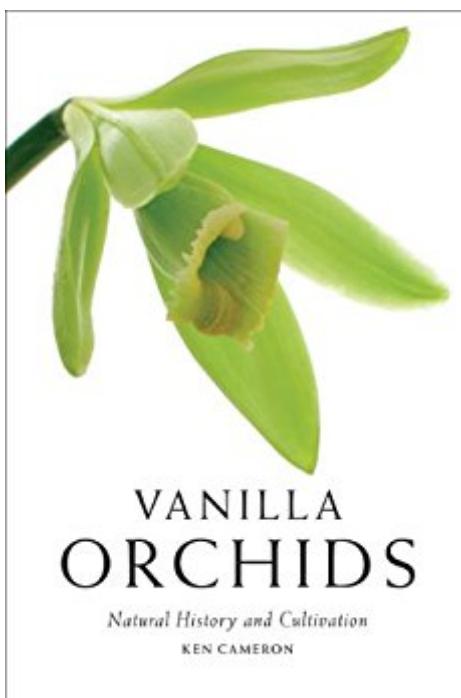


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Vanilla Orchids: Natural History And Cultivation



Synopsis

With more than 30,000 known species, orchids represent the largest family of plants. But only one genus has agricultural value—the Vanilla orchid. Leading orchid expert Ken Cameron covers the natural history of the world's most popular flavor and fragrance and provides an introduction to the pollination, biology, structure, evolution, and diversity of Vanilla and related orchids. Vanilla Orchids also features methods for bean harvest, curing, and processing for enthusiasts who want to try it at home.

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Customer Reviews

As someone who has researched Vanilla, I can say that Ken Cameron has done a great job of covering the subject. From the fascinating history, to the reason of why it is so expensive and labor intensive, to the many uses that we don't think of, no aspect of this orchid has been overlooked.

I became obsessed with vanilla orchids and love this book. Recommended.

Fairly thorough for the price; though with that being said I'm not sure if its enough information to render useful in a marketable cultivation and production type of situation.

Well written book that is laid out well. All you will ever need to know about Vanilla Orchids in one place.

Was a biologist before I went back to school to become an accountant (someone's gotta pay the rent), if I ever find myself independently wealthy, I'll be looking to study under Ken Cameron. This is accessible while being exceptionally in-depth. A total geek-out joy for anyone who likes the following: reading, cooking, eating, botany, genetics, biology, ecology, flowers, pretty pictures, the tropics, vanilla, orchids, and more.

Since vanilla is the world's most popular spice and fragrance, and since it comes from orchids, and since orchid fanciers are notoriously obsessive and thorough, it comes as a surprise to learn that until very recently even the basic biology of the vanilla orchids was little known. Nobody was even sure what fertilized them. It turned out to be a solitary bee. That's in the wild. In cultivation, fertilization is done by young girls, whose small and agile fingers are adapted to lifting a flap of tissue so that the pollen can be brushed over onto the stamen. This delicate method was devised by a 12-year-old boy, a slave, on the island of Reunion in 1842. Since a vanillery can have hundreds of vines, and since the vines open only one flower a day, and since fertilization has to be done within a short time window (a couple of hours), the girls are busy. One farm may have to fertilize a million blossoms in a year. It becomes clear why real vanilla is so expensive. Ken Cameron, who was part of the research network that used DNA analysis to sort out the taxonomic relationships among the three commercial kinds of vanilla and their hundred or so close relatives, presents an admirably clear, and very concise, roundup of the history, biology, culture and trade in vanilla. Half the book consists of color photographs, not only of vanilla, vanilla products and vanilla farmers, but also of some of the more curious vanilla relatives. Some are curious, indeed, including the leafless varieties, just long vines. Vanillas are the only viny orchids, and while many people think that they, like many other orchids, are parasites and/or epiphytes, neither is correct. Vanilla orchids grow from seeds (in cultivation, from cuttings), but after climbing tall trees, sometimes the roots rot away, leaving an entirely aerial plant still thriving. It is comparatively easy to synthesize the main flavor component, vanillin, from such unlovely substances as wood pulp; and difficult to cure the scentless fruits into

the brown, oily and fragrant vanilla "beans." But to connoisseurs, the difference between real, pure vanilla, with its complex odor blended from 250 chemicals; and artificial vanilla, with its one chemical, is worth the price. There is good consumer advice here, too. "Pure vanilla," it turns out, is not the same as "natural vanilla," which is, in common parlance, unnatural. Tourists in Latin America should be grateful to the Food and Drug Administration and wary of a product sold south of the border that is cheap, smells of vanilla and can destroy your kidneys.

I enjoy this book I wish it had more info. into the cultivation and the vanilla bean methods of treatment.

Well written, with plenty of photos, to give orchid lovers an understanding of this old, cross-continent plant. Good info on how its varieties grow and produce vanilla.

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