

NOTES ON ORCHIDS CULTIVATED IN CEYLON

VANDA TESSELLATA Hk.

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THE Vandas constitute a magnificent genus of purely epiphytal orchids, mostly confined to Asiatic countries; there are over a score of species, most of which attain a considerable size and are among the largest found in the Old World.

The majority of Vandas are stately in habit, handsome in bloom and easy to cultivate.

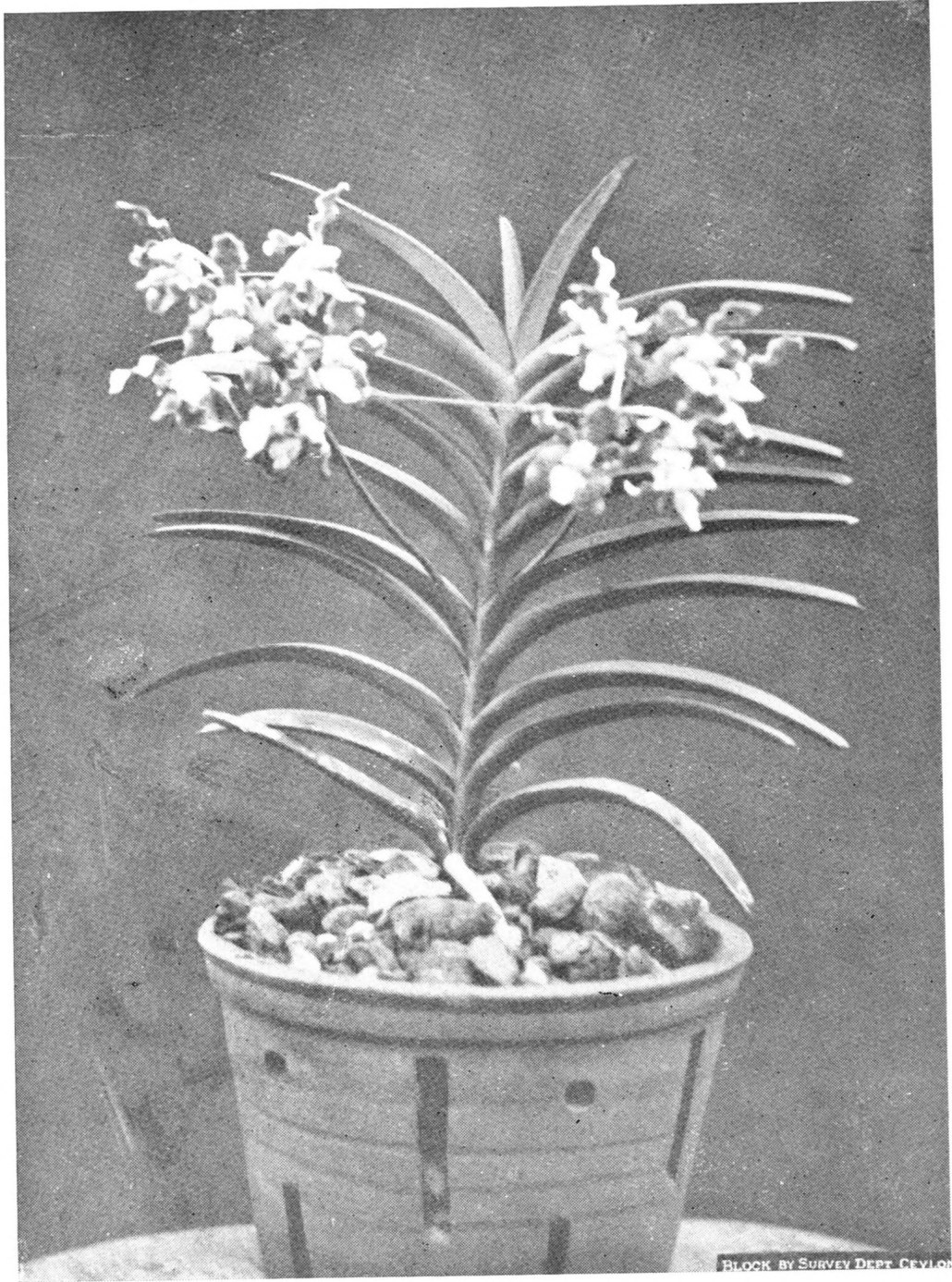
Practically all the species are evergreen. Their leaves are frequently strap-shaped, occasionally oblong and in a few species cylindrical, the apices being either bifid or irregularly jagged.

A good many species of the genus produce many flowered racemes which rise in the axil of a leaf or on the opposite side of the stem.

Vanda tessellata Hk. popularly known by its synonym *Vanda Roxburghii* Br. grows on the forest trees and among rocks and boulders in decaying humus in the dry regions of Ceylon. It is also indigenous to India and Burma.

It is interesting to recall how it came by more than one name. This orchid was first called *Epidendrum tessellatum* by Roxburgh and later Robert Brown gave it the name *Vanda Roxburghii*; Hooker renamed it *Vanda tessellata* for taxonomic reasons, and this name should now be used.

The plant is usually one to two feet high but under favourable conditions much larger specimens have been found. The stout woody stem is closely set with leaves that arch to almost a semi-circle. The leaf is fleshy and narrow, about six to eight inches long, with a jagged apex.



Vanda tessellata Hk.

A peculiarity of this species is that flowers of different shades of colour occur in different plants. In Ceylon the following varieties have been found:

(1) *Vanda tessellata* Hk.—Petals and sepals mottled pale-yellow on a dull brownish ground, undersides and margins white; column spotted with rosy pink, labellum violet-blue with dots of a darker shade of the same hue.

(2) *Vanda tessellata* Hk. var. *Forma rufescens* Alst.—Petals and sepals of pale-buff with brown lines, undersides and margins white; column mottled with pink and labellum purple. This flower is very conspicuous and is perhaps the prettiest and least common.

(3) *Vanda tessellata* Hk. var. *Forma lutescens* Alst.—Petals and sepals dull-yellow greenish brown, undersides and margins white; column mottled with violet-purple, labellum blue.

The flowers are fragrant and about two inches across, borne on an erect spike six to twelve inches long.

The flowering season is from March to August but it is not unusual to see plants in bloom during other months in dry spells. The flowers last a long time, often over six weeks.

Culture.—*Vanda tessellata* Hk., is not well adapted to pot culture, but we can arrive at a compromise, whereby a certain amount of success can be achieved, by closely following nature. But where the climatic conditions are similar to those of its habitat, as for instance in the wet low-country, all the attention it needs is to tie the plant on to the trunk of a tree and syringe occasionally. The plant will look after itself and flower regularly.

To revert to pot culture, it should be borne in mind that this orchid dislikes its roots being confined in a close, compact manner. Often, roots make their way out of the pot in search of air and warmth. These should not be disturbed or turned back into the pot.

Newly collected specimens should be cleansed of all injured portions and dead roots, placed among the branches of a low spreading shrub or in some similar airy and cool place, and syringed regularly. In the course of a few weeks new roots will begin to emerge from old ones or from the stem itself; this is the time to pot the plant.

It is best to select only the medium-sized ones for this purpose; and pots with large perforations or wooden baskets are the best receptacles. Holding the plant erect in the receptacle, fill the latter with a compost made of half decayed wood and weathered bits of coconut husk, with a few pieces of charcoal and bits of bone to open the compost.

The small plants can be tied on to small sections of wood with a little coir or moss at the roots to conserve moisture and prevent injury to them when tying the plant with string. The large plants are best tied on to the trunks of trees.

When potting or tying plants against trees aerial roots pointing outwards should not be brought back into the pot or to the tree but allowed to wander at will. Until it has established itself, it is not so much actual watering that is required as a humid atmosphere and this is easily afforded by wetting the surroundings.