

Phalaenopsis amabilis

[Synonyms : *Angreacum album majus*, *Cymbidium amabile*, *Epidendrum amabile*, *Phalaenopsis celebica*, *Phalaenopsis gloriosa*, *Phalaenopsis grandiflora*, *Phalaenopsis rimestadiana*]

BUTTERFLY ORCHID is an epiphytic evergreen orchid. Native to northern Australia and to parts of Indonesia and Malaysia, it has large waxy sometimes fragrant, often pink beneath, white flowers with red and yellow marked, white lip.

It is also known as *Anggerek bulan* (Malay), Butterfly plant, Moon orchid, Moth orchid, *Phalaenopsis*, White moth orchid, and White orchid.

The flowers can remain in bloom for as long as four months.

Amabilis is Latin (amiable, lovable) meaning ‘beautiful or lovely’.

Some authorities note that Hugh Cuming (1791-1865), a respected English conchologist and botanist, found this orchid during his 1835-1839 trip to the Philippines and it is he who is credited with probably being the first collector to send living orchids home to England from Manila by ship – while other authorities point out that this orchid was first described by Georgius Everhardus Rumphius (1627-1702) a German-born natural historian who called it *Angreacum album majus*. (G.E. Rumphius came to be employed by the Dutch East India Company in Indonesia and ultimately ended his days on the island of Ambon. Even though he suffered from glaucoma and became blind at 42, from which time he relied upon scribes and artists, remarkably he produced many publications of which some say the most celebrated was a Herbal or Flora of Ambon which contained 1661 leaves and 695 plates.) From Rumphius to the present day butterfly orchid experienced a busy time. It may well have reached English shores first in the early 1750s, was re-named *Epidendrum amabile* in 1753 by Linnaeus (1707-1778) the celebrated Swedish naturalist and physician, moved to its present genus as *Phalaenopsis amabilis* in 1825 – before it travelled live to England in Hugh Cuming’s collection.

When butterfly orchid reached England under the aegis of Hugh Cuming it was first grown at Chatsworth as an ornamental plant. It was also discovered in Java (now part of Indonesia) and sent home to Britain in 1843 by John Lobb where it was destined to take its place in the Horticultural Society’s orchid collection. In little more than a decade later however the Society was to find itself in some financial difficulty. In order to raise money it had to sell the orchid collection and the butterfly orchid which occupied a central position in it, alone fetched the sum of £68 5s.0d.

Butterfly orchid was adopted in 1990 as one of Indonesia’s national flowers – with Arabian jasmine (*Jasminum sambac*) and monster plant (*Rafflesia arnoldii*). The flower is also one of the white orchids now popularly found in Japanese wedding bouquets.

This orchid in the eyes of some south-eastern Asian authorities is primarily of importance to the region as an ornamental plant.