

Orchid of the Month for June, 2015

Oncidium Longipes

by Bruce Adams



Figure 1: *Oncidium longipes*

When I first fell in love with orchids, about forty years ago, *Oncidium* was my favorite genus. I loved the intricate flowers on long sprays, often with a wonderful fragrance. At that time, I worked as a volunteer in the orchid house at Planting Fields Arboretum. After repotting plants, I had the opportunity to take home back bulbs, and received pieces of *Oncidium sphacelatum*, *O. flexuosum*, and others that I can no longer remember. Every year they had an orchid auction, and for the extravagant price of five dollars, I purchased a multi-lead plant of *O. ornithorhyncum*. I became familiar with many of the various species, and at the time was a bit of an *Oncidium* expert. Forty years later, I've forgotten much, and with the recent changes in nomenclature maybe I wasn't ever really an *Oncidium* expert, but rather a *Trichocentrum*, *Gomesa*, and *Tolumnia* expert!

What hasn't changed is my fondness for this vast genus (or group of genera). Plants can get quite large, such as *Oncidium sphacelatum*, which can easily fill a twelve-inch pot, sending out three foot spikes with hundreds of flowers. But there are also miniatures like *Oncidium harrisonianum*, which can be contained in a three or four inch pot and sports short sprays of pretty little yellow flowers with brown spots. In fact, most *Oncidium* flowers are a variation of yellow and brown, although *Oncidium ornithorhyncum* produces pretty purple pink flowers, while *Oncidium phalaenopsis* and its relatives have beautiful white to red flowers, often spotted with pink.

Here in the Sacramento valley we are blessed with a mild winter that allows many of us to keep some of our orchids outside year round. *Cymbidium*, *Dendrobium kingianum*, even *Zygopetalum* and some *Coelogyne* are able to endure our cool wet winters with only a modicum of protection, either from an overhead evergreen tree, or the overhang from the roof of your house. There are also many *Oncidium* that can remain outdoors. For instance, *Oncidium flexuosum* does very well with a cool dry winter, and has the added benefit of being able to spread into a large specimen plant. I have one on a tree in my yard, but to date it has not bloomed, probably due to not receiving enough light.

This month's Orchid of the Month, *Oncidium longipes*, is a great plant for outdoors, not only surviving, but thriving and producing copious flowers during the late spring to early summer. *Oncidium longipes* is a small plant, found in Peru, Southern Brazil, and Paraguay. It is closely related to *O. uniflorum* and *O. regentii* (1).



Figure 2: *Oncidium longipes*, closeup

I grow my plant in bright shade, with a bit of morning and afternoon sun. It is mounted on a piece of cork, which has pretty much been covered by the small pseudobulbs. I keep it rather wet in the summer and dry in the winter. I feed every few weeks, spring through fall, with Michigan fertilizer mixed with reverse osmosis water. The plant tends to get some white deposits on the leaves from the misting system, but this does not seem to affect the flowering at all. The three to four inch flower spikes carry only one to two flowers, but with a tendency to make many pseudobulbs, a mature plant can have many flowers. My plant currently has about twenty flowers, with several buds yet to open. It flowers for me in mid June.



Figure 3: Specimen plant no larger than a six inch basket, at left

The plant seems to be pretty resilient. Mine has been outdoors year round for at least five years. In fact, it had never bloomed indoors until I left it out for winter. I suppose that, coming from a cooler climate, *O. longipes* requires a cool/cold rest in order to flower. That works fine for me, considering how little space I have in my miniature greenhouse of only four by six feet. Any plant that tolerates, let alone desires, an outdoor growing spot, is welcome in my collection.

The Santa Barbara Orchid Estate describes *Oncidium longipes* as “temperature tolerant”, able to tolerate a range from 32 degrees, up to 100 degrees (2). Of course, in Sacramento our lows are just a bit lower, and our highs are a bit higher, but with some protection in the winter, and midday shade in the summer, these plants do quite well. I plan to try some more *Oncidium* in the future, expanding my collection of these beauties. These were the orchids that first grabbed my attention almost forty years ago, and they still hold a place in my heart.

Footnotes:

- (1) <http://www.orchidspecies.com/oncilingipes.htm>
- (2) Santa Barbara Orchid Estate Website: <http://sborchid.com/>

Sources:

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*About the author: Bruce Adams has been growing orchids for 38 years, since he got his first Orchid, *Oncidium retermeyerianum* (now *Lophiaris lindenii*!) from *Orchids by Hausermann*. His plants split their time between the great outdoors and a cool greenhouse in the winter, as well as on the windowsill. He is also the author of the novel, *The Palace of Dreams*. His*

ideal life would consist of writing and growing orchids, while living in Hawaii with his lovely wife, Linda.

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