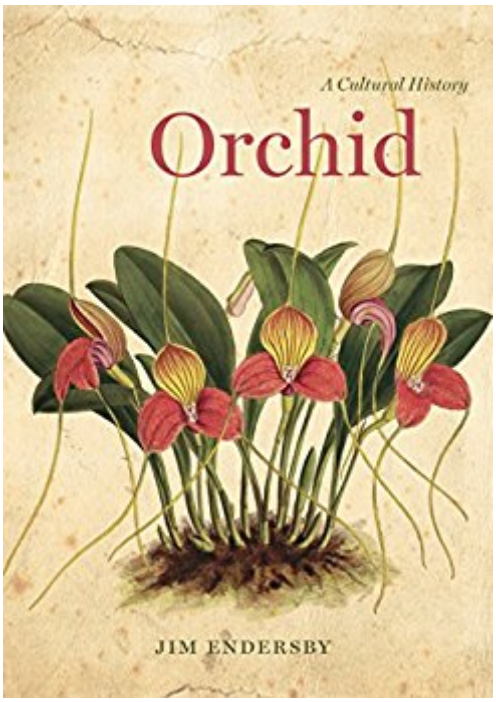
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Orchid: A Cultural History



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Synopsis

At once delicate, exotic, and elegant, orchids are beloved for their singular, instantly recognizable beauty. Found in nearly every climate, the many species of orchid have carried symbolic weight in countless cultures over time.Ã Â The ancient Greeks associated them with fertility and thought that parents who ingested orchid root tubers could control the sex of their child.Ã Â During the Victorian era, orchids became deeply associated with romance and seduction. And in twentieth-century hard-boiled detective stories, they transformed into symbols of decadence, secrecy, and cunning. What is it about the orchid that has enthralled the imagination for so many centuries? And why do they still provoke so much wonder?Ã Â Following the stories of orchids throughout history, Jim Endersby divides our attraction to them into four key themes: science, empire, sex, and death. When it comes to empire, for instance, orchids are a prime example of the exotic riches sought by Europeans as they shaped their plans for colonization. He also reveals how Charles DarwinÃ¢â ¬â„¢s theory of evolution became intimately entangled with the story of the orchid as he investigated their methods of cross-pollination. As he shows, orchidsÃ¢â ¬â •perhaps because of their extraordinarily diverse colors, shapes, and sizesÃ¢â ¬â •have also bloomed repeatedly in films, novels, plays, and poems, from Shakespeare to science fiction, from thrillers to elaborate modernist novels.Ã Â Featuring many gorgeous illustrations from the collection of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Orchid: A Cultural History tells, for the first time, the extraordinary story of orchids and our prolific interest in them. It is an enchanting tale not only for gardeners and plant collectors, but anyone curious about the flowerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s obsessive hold on the imagination in history, cinema, literature, and more.

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Customer Reviews

Excellent seller; would use again. Far beyond just a picture book, this work goes deeply into the meaning of the orchid and its treatment in literature, film, and song; it's associations with the exotic, sophisticated, and mysterious. We gave this as a gift, but the lady's husband snatched it from her to read it first! A great addition to anyone's library.

I would highly recommend this book, not only to readers interested in botanical history but to anyone curious about how a single plant family came to intrigue and even obsess Mankind. This extremely well-written and researched book informs as well as entertains, and there is a rich mix of easy-to-understand technical information, historical anecdote, and discussion of the orchid's symbolic role in fiction and movies. This volume is beautifully produced, and it features a fine selection of black-&-white illustrations and colour plates.

I was expecting more depth and research following the review I read in the RHS's monthly journal. This was a good read and I recommend it to people who like and/or grow orchids.

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