

Native Orchid of the Month—November

*Phaius tankervilleae*  
(nun's orchid)

*Phaius tankervilleae* (nun's orchid) is named for its curved upper sepal and petals that are white on the back side, resembling a nun's cap. It is native to northeastern Australia, southeastern Asia, and the Pacific Islands. It has been naturalized in many places throughout the tropics, including the southeastern United States.



The plant forms large clumps with inflorescences as tall as 4 feet bearing 10-20 fragrant flowers, opening up in succession. Sword shaped leaves develop as the tall inflorescences of white, rose and brown flowers reaches full bloom in the late spring. The species produces a new plant on a short bulb-like runner every year and flowers magnificently during

March and April. It prefers the shade of trees and can take a long dry period before the flowering.

The inflorescence arises from a pseudobulb or rhizome. Flowers are believed to develop in response to reduced hours of daylight, mainly during late winter and early spring. Each inflorescence opens over a period of up to 6 weeks and the flowers last for about a month.

These spectacular orchids have a preference for moderate light and warm temperatures, making them easier to please around and in homes than many other species. It is a tropical plant and subject to freeze damage—in most areas throughout Louisiana, they are grown in pots so that they can be protected in the winter months. If planted directly into the soil, they need to be protected during the winter.

