

Judging Standard Yellow Cattleyas

By George Hatfield

Standard yellow cattleyas have been created primarily from a few members of the *Cattleya* Alliance. In the background are *Cattleya dowiana* and *Cattleya aurea* (also referred to as *C. dowiana* var. *aurea*). To a lesser extent, *Cattleya bicolor*, *Laelia tenebrosa* and *Rhyncholaelia* (syn. *Brassavola*) *digbyana* are found in standard yellow cattleyas. Because of the influential roles that *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea* play in the development and, therefore, the judging of standard yellow cattleyas, we will take a look at them.

Cattleya dowiana was first discovered by Warscewicz in Costa Rica about 1850. Plants the he sent to Europe were lost or quickly succumbed and he was unable to document his discovery. The plants were rediscovered in 1865 by Mr. Arce collecting for George Ure-Skinner. Skinner requested that the plant be named after Capt. J. M. Dow of the American Packet Service, who took the plants to England. *Cattleya dowiana*, a colorful species, has a limited distribution in Costa Rica. It has richly colored yellow petals and sepals with a rich maroon lip and gold-color veining. Sometimes the petals are flecked at the base, along the margins and suffused on the undersides with crimson.

Cattleya aurea is found in Colombia. It was discovered in 1868 near Frontino, in the state of Antioquia by Gustav Walis. *Cattleya aurea* is similar in appearance to *C. dowiana*, but lacks red pigment in the petals and has a more extensive yellow marking in the lip, characterized as “eyes” due to their proportions. This close resemblance has caused confusion in separating the species. To complicate matters, Sander’s lumped the two species together, so distinction of species in early hybridizing is nearly impossible.

HYBRIDIZING Breeding with *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea* created many challenges for the early hybridizers and to some degree is responsible for retarding the development of standard yellow cattleyas as a group. *Cattleya dowiana* and *C. aurea* are not easy to grow. Both of these species easily lose their roots if over watered and are attacked by bacterial and fungal diseases. The flowers tend to be short lived, when cut from the plant, and are subject to crippling. The crippling of the flowers is quite insidious and to this day is not totally understood. Crippling can show up in varying degrees. Sometimes, the only effect of crippling is the irregular opening of a petal to an extreme of polliinious-looking growths on the margins of the sepal and petals. The crippling effect seems to increase in severity with the age of the plant. Crippling can vary from year to year; occasionally it seems to be latent for a year. Only through selective breeding have we been able to develop plants that are showing a significant decrease in this crippling effect.

JUDGING YELLOW CATTLEYAS

Features to be Rewarded in Yellow Cattleyas:

- 1) Extra wide, flat petals and sepals
- 2) Natural width in excess of 17 cm
- 3) Three or more well-spaced flowers per inflorescence
- 4) Clean vibrant color

Typical Faults in Standard Yellow Cattleyas:

- 1) Isthmus at the throat of the labellum
- 2) Narrowness of petals and sepals
- 3) Imbalance of labellum size to proportion of flower

Fatal Flaws in Standard Yellow Cattleyas:

- 1) Deformed petals and sepals (crippling)
- 2) Color breaks and sepals

JUDGING CRITERIA AND POINT SCALES Below is a list of judging criteria with comments as outlined in the *American Orchid Society Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*; Tenth Edition, 1997, section 7.1.1, followed by some personal observations.

Flower Form (30 points)

General Form

Judges Handbook The flower form should be toward fullness and roundness. A circumscribed circle, drawn with the base of the column as the center, should touch the tips of the petals and sepals and the margin of the lip, while the flower should fill the greater portion of the area of the circle.

Observations As a group, standard yellow cattleyas have only recently started coming close to the fullness desired, particularly in *Brassolaeliocattleya*. The *Brassolaeliocattleya* Goldenzelle line, with the influence of *Cattleya* Horace, has brought yellows in line with other color forms: purples, lavenders and whites. Reward breeding that continues the forms we desire and maintains the distinct color form that distinguishes this group. Look for freedom from crippling. At this point we should not award any plant that has any flowers that show crippling to any extent. Remember there is so much influence of *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea* in this group that, compared to other color forms, yellows are not yet at the same point.

Sepals

Judges Handbook Sepals should arrange themselves almost in an equilateral triangle. They should be broad and fill in the gap between the petals.

Observations Our benchmark yellow cattleyas are achieving this form. Twisting and recurved sepals are unacceptable. The influence of other species such as *Cattleya trianae* in the *Blc.* Goldenzelle line of breeding has helped.

Petals

Judges Handbook Petals should be erect to slightly arched, broad and rounded, frilled, or undulated at the margins according to the variety.

Observations Like sepals, the petals we see in some of our newer yellow cattleyas are achieving standards closer to perfection. We should expect some frilling in the petals of our yellow cattleyas because there is such a heavy influence of *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea*. Check for any defects, such as crippling as this line of breeding has shown in the past.

Labellum

Judges Handbook The lip should be proportionate to the petals with a round, flattened, symmetrical, and crisped or frilled trumpet or isthmus in accordance with its background; it should be closed toward the base and more or less rolled around the column.

Observations The influence of both *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea* can be seen as a very large frilled lip to its progeny. Some of the earlier lines with a greater percentage of *C. bicolor* in its background have a smaller spade-shape-type lip.

Color of Flower (30 Points)

General Color and Sepals and Petals

Judges Handbook The color of the flower should be clear, bright and strong, evenly dispersed throughout the petals and sepals without washing out at the mid-veins. The hue should be consistent with the parentage or an unusual shade, without spotting, breaking or splashing, except where a balanced and harmonious pattern exists.

Observations Our expectation of color in the yellow cattleya lines has been matched in the present lines of breeding. There are many examples of clear, bright and strong colors in the modern yellow breeding, such as *Brassolaeliocattleya* Goldenzelle and *Brassolaeliocattleya* Toshie Aoki. Flowers that do not exhibit these characteristics should be scored low. Be careful not to become seduced by color or markings. Striking color forms exist with yellow sepals and petals with red lips, concolor yellow flowers and even some with splash petals.

Color of Labellum

Judges Handbook The lip should be more prominently and richly colored, blending or pleasingly contrasting with the rest of the flower. Additional markings, if present, should form a symmetrical pattern.

Observations With the heavy influence of *C. dowiana* and *C. aurea* we have many clones that display richly colored red labellum. Dark pigmentation in the labellums offer us a very striking contrast between the yellow-golden sepals and petals and the richly colored lips. Some breeding lines have a “oncolor affect with a absence of red markings in the labellum.” This color pattern can also be pleasing.

Other Characteristics (40 Points)

Size of Flower

Judges Handbook The size of the flower should be equal to or greater than the geometric mean of the size of the parents. The potential of the species in size may already have been established by the fine forms discovered in their natural habits.

Observations In yellow cattleyas, we have yet to achieve the size present in their color forms. Natural width is the average range of *Blc.* yellow cattleyas (13 to 15 cm). In the past five years, the AOS has only awarded one plant with a natural width greater than 16 cm. With the influx of other species, we should expect greater size in the future. A flower of 16-plus centimeters should be recognized for its achievement.

Substance and Texture

Judges Handbook Substance of a high degree is now standard through polyploidy forms. Texture should be sparkling, crystalline, velvety or waxy.

Observations We have examples of breeding in yellow cattleyas that are thought to be polyploids. Plants that are weak in substance and texture should be scored low.

Floriferousness and Stem

Judges Handbook Floriferousness is closely related to parental background and size of flowers. While cattleyas with one exceptional flower may be judged, labiata-type cattleyas should have two or more flowers to be considered. The stem should be strong and upright to display the flowers to their best of advantage, so that one flower does not crowd and distort another.

CONCLUSION Standard yellow cattleyas have made great strides in improving the breeding lines. Breeders have significantly reduced the crippling effects that predominated in years past. Only through selective breeding will this factor be totally removed from this group. As judging personnel, we will facilitate this accomplishment by diligently screening plants that show any sign of crippling. We need to understand the breeding hurdles that have been part of what makes standard yellow cattleyas unique. Placing the same template standards on these plants that breeders have achieved in other colors of standard cattleyas is not appropriate. Awarding plants that have exceeded established benchmarks in their category will promote this distinct group.

Benchmarks in Breeding Standard Yellow Cattleyas

Grex	Parentage	Registrant	Registered
1900-1935			
<i>Cattleya</i> Iris	<i>C. bicolor</i> x <i>C. dowiana</i>	Charlesworth Ltd.	19001
<i>Brassocattleya</i> Mrs. J. Leeman	<i>B. digbyana</i> x <i>C. dowiana</i>	Marion	1902
<i>Laeliocattleya</i> Mrs. Medo	<i>Lc. Luminosa</i> x <i>C. Venus</i>	Low's	1922
1936-1955			
<i>Laeliocattleya</i> Grandee	<i>Lc. Mrs. Medo</i> x <i>C. Aeneas</i>	Armacost and Royston	1937
<i>Laeliocattleya</i> S. J. Bracey	<i>Lc. Mrs. Medo</i> x <i>C. Thebes</i>	Armacost and Royston	1940
<i>Laeliocattleya</i> Derna	<i>C. dowiana</i> x <i>Lc. Nugget</i>	Black and Flory	1941
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Xanthette	<i>Blc. Midenette</i> x <i>Blc. Xanthedo</i>	S.A.	1948
<i>Laeliocattleya</i> Mem. Albert Heinecke	<i>Lc. Grandee</i> x <i>Lc. S.J. Bracey</i>	Bracey	1949
<i>Laeliocattleya</i>	<i>Lc. Derna</i> x <i>Lc.</i>	McDade	1852

Amber Glow	Anne Walker		
1955-1975			
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Golden Galleon	<i>Blc.</i> Xanthette x <i>Blc.</i> Camilla	Clark Day Jr.	1962
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Malworth	<i>Lc.</i> Charlesworthii x <i>Blc.</i> Malvern	Jones and Scully	1963
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Fortune	<i>Lc.</i> Mem. Albert Heinecke x <i>Blc.</i> Xanthette	Stewart Inc.	1963
Modern Era			
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Toshie Aoki	<i>Blc.</i> Faye Miyamoto x <i>Blc.</i> Waianae Flare	Tharp, A (Miyamoto's)	1980
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i> Goldenzelle	<i>Blc.</i> Fortune x <i>C.</i> Horace	Hanes, J.	1982

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Published in September 2000 Awards Quarterly, pages 242-244.