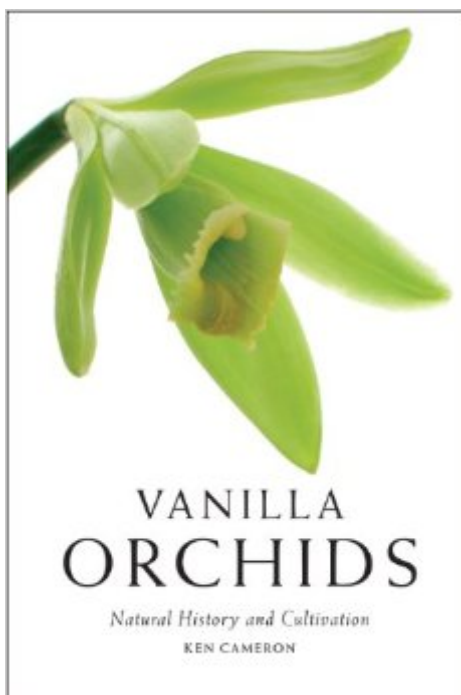


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Vanilla Orchids: Natural History And Cultivation



Synopsis

With more than 30,000 known species, orchids represent the largest family of plants. But only one genus has agricultural value—the Vanilla orchid. Leading orchid expert Ken Cameron covers the natural history of the world's most popular flavor and fragrance and provides an introduction to the pollination, biology, structure, evolution, and diversity of Vanilla and related orchids. Vanilla Orchids also features methods for bean harvest, curing, and processing for enthusiasts who want to try it at home.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Since vanilla is the world's most popular spice and fragrance, and since it comes from orchids, and since orchid fanciers are notoriously obsessive and thorough, it comes as a surprise to learn that until very recently even the basic biology of the vanilla orchids was little known. Nobody was even sure what fertilized them. It turned out to be a solitary bee. That's in the wild. In cultivation, fertilization is done by young girls, whose small and agile fingers are adapted to lifting a flap of tissue so that the pollen can be brushed over onto the stamen. This delicate method was devised by a 12-year-old boy, a slave, on the island of Reunion in 1842. Since a vanillery can have hundreds of vines, and since the vines open only one flower a day, and since fertilization has to be done within a short time window (a couple of hours), the girls are busy. One farm may have to fertilize a million blossoms in a year. It becomes clear why real vanilla is so expensive. Ken Cameron, who was part of the research network that used DNA analysis to sort out the taxonomic relationships among the

three commercial kinds of vanilla and their hundred or so close relatives, presents an admirably clear, and very concise, roundup of the history, biology, culture and trade in vanilla. Half the book consists of color photographs, not only of vanilla, vanilla products and vanilla farmers, but also of some of the more curious vanilla relatives. Some are curious, indeed, including the leafless varieties, just long vines. Vanillas are the only viny orchids, and while many people think that they, like many other orchids, are parasites and/or epiphytes, neither is correct.

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