

# Introducing Jewel Orchids

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Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are.  
Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond in the sky.  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are!

Jewel orchids have attractive leaves that can be likened to the stars that glitter in the night sky. During daytime, jewel orchids also sparkle like gems when their leaves reflect the sunlight that shines upon them.



**Above:** A stamp of an jewel orchid, *Anoectochilus setaceus* (left). Another jewel orchid, *Anoectochilus albolineatus*, growing *in-situ* with *Globba* spp. and other herbaceous plants (right).

Jewel orchids are a diverse group of plants coming from several genera including *Anoechtochilus*, *Goodyera*, *Ludisia*, *Macodes*, *Malaxis* and *Zeuxin*. Altogether, there are more than 100 species and they can be found from regions stretching from Himalayas all the way to New Caledonia. These beauties are often found in the wild as terrestrials, occasionally as lithophytes on mossy rocks and epiphytes perching on moss-covered tree branches.



**Left:** A green-leaved jewel orchid flowering *in-situ*.

Most of them have interesting leaf patterns and their leaves are often velvety, capable of reflecting light when viewed from certain angles. Most of these plants are grown mainly for the appreciation of their beautiful foliage as most of the jewel orchids produce small flowers.



**Above:** *Ludisia discolor* (left) and *Ludisia discolor alba* (right).

The best known and the easiest to grow of all the jewel orchids is *Ludisa discolor*. This plant is easily available in major nurseries in Singapore. It has dark green velvety leaves with reddish yellow veins. There is an *alba* version which is much more rarer and very desirable!!!



**Above:** *Malaxis oculata*.

*Malaxis oculata* is another jewel orchid that does well in tropical lowlands condition. Although it has no intricate vein patterns, it is a winner in its own right. Its leaves have a coppery sheen on top and are green on the underside.



**Left:** *Malaxis calophylla*.

Another irresistible beauty that is easy to grow is *Malaxis calophylla*. It has acute bicolour variegation leaves which look fabulous even when the plant is not in bloom.

There are many other jewel orchids which are not introduced here. The following are just some samples of the very attractive and desirable jewel orchid species that are available in Singapore nurseries.



## Cultivation

These little beauties would do well in a sheltered, filtered light corner. For them to flourish, ensure that they are grown under cool, well-ventilated and moist conditions.



**Right:** Jewel orchids growing happily and blooming away under a sheltered, cool, well ventilated plant rack.

Most of jewel orchids would do well when they are grown in a free draining potting mix. One potting mix combination that can be used for most jewel orchid is as follows:

- 30% of perlite or small styrofoam chips
- 30% portion of small stone chips
- 30% portion of soil
- 10% of sphagnum moss (to spread over the base of the pot to block the drainage holes and one thin layer to be used to spread over the surface of the growing medium to maintain humidity)

## Acknowledgements

Green Culture Singapore would like to thank Ian Chung for contributing this article, which introduces the world of jewel orchids and tips on how to grow them.

## Feedback for this Article

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