



*Epi. Joseph's Dream
Colour 'Momo'*

Reedstem Epidendrums Lynne Phelan

Reedstem epidendrums are a large group of plants whose cultivation dates back hundreds of years. They are the jewels of the garden in sub-tropical climates, producing long lasting flowers in a variety of bright colours. The exciting new hybrids are based on four ancestral species which come from southern USA to Argentina in South America: *Epi. ibaguense*, *Epi. radicans*, *Epi. secundum* and *Epi. cinnabarinum* (colloquially, the crucifix orchid). Hawaiian breeders have been at the forefront of hybridising and we are now able to purchase, at very reasonable prices, some very colourful, floriferous and fairly easy to grow crosses.

Most reedstem epidendrums don't form pseudobulbs but have elongated, reed-like canes which produce flowers at the apex when mature. Some of the ancestral species are quite tall but the hybridisers are breeding more compact plants with large flower heads and multiple inflorescences in many unusual colour combinations. They are easily propagated from the many keikis, or new vegetative growths, that are often produced on the old stems and flower spikes. I wait until the keikis have small roots then I twist the plantlet off the mother plant and pot it up. If you don't remove them they will readily flower attached to the mother plant.



*Epi. Candy Valley
#2 'Candy Pink'*



*Epi. Topaz Delight
'Carminé'*

Some of mine grow on the verandah in full sun and exposed to whatever temperatures the weather serves up. Others I keep in the shadehouse with no heating though it does have a rain roof so I control the watering. The flowers are long lived and one, *Epi. Lilac Queen*, is rarely out of flower. Pruning the spent flowers and stems is important as it helps promote strong, new basal growths. Most reedstems will only flower on new growths so there is no need to retain the old growths. The dense clusters of flowers last for ages as the buds keep forming and opening in the centre of the inflorescence until you have a large ball of colour. In the new hybrids the colours range from pure white through creams, yellows, oranges, to raspberry reds and purples. They need high light levels – too little and they will be leggy – and, like most epiphytic orchids, need an open, well-drained potting media.

I ease up on the watering in winter for all my orchids, including the reedstems, and cease fertilising.

When cutting off old, flowered stems do not discard them. I stand them in water and they invariably sprout keikis which can be potted up and shared with other members. They can flower on quite small plants.

The three pictured flowered in December so you can have a colourful Christmas display.

I believe some of the newer hybrids that are so showy are better suited to intermediate conditions but mine seem to be OK on the verandah or in the shadehouse. They used to be considered a garden weed but the new hybrids are certainly showy enough to warrant a spot in any orchid collection.

Reference: *AOS Orchids* Vol. 82, No. 10.

