

My Favourite Orchid

By Hayley O'Donnell

For this year's "your favourite orchid" essay competition I have chosen *Bifrenaria harrisoniae*. This plant is a native of Brazil. It grows in rocky areas as well as on rocks and trees in warm, humid rain forests areas. So, in other words, in places like forest and rocky places like rivers and that kind of thing. The *Bifrenaria harrisoniae* is a popular orchid and has been in cultivation for a very long time. It was one of the first orchids introduced to England during the year 1821. It has since been popular with orchid growers all over the world.

It is loved a lot for its wide opening, waxy flowers that are usually the colour of cream with a magenta colour lip. They have a strong fragrance with angular pseudo-bulbs and large, thick leaves. Bright light and gentle air movement is needed for this specific orchid to grow their flowers. Lots of water is needed, preferably heavy watering. This is needed when the plants are in active growth. Water is needed occasionally after its growth has matured and when cool temperatures are about as well as during the short wintery days.



Right now I can say that orchids can be relatively easy to grow but sometimes are difficult to change from one pot to another. Especially when either they have grown out of their pots or have split or broken the pot due to their root system beginning to break the pot. They can also suffer a setback from the issue of repotting and of course should be repotted only when it is absolutely necessary and not when you want or think you need to change the pot. When you repot you need to change the growing medium. I find that the easiest way to care for orchids is by leaving them in their pots and shifting them around when still in their pots or even when you buy the orchid and plan to leave it in a spot where you will not need to move it.

A little about my experience with Orchids!

I started growing orchids on the second week of term two being the fifth of February at Willunga High School 2014. I decided to join the Orchid Club because I was interested and wanted to learn about growing orchids and because I liked to do things with my friends. They had decided to join as well. The first time that I saw orchids was out in fields around the area of Willunga High School

reserves. I do not grow any types of orchids at my home as my parents think that they are a pain and are hard to grow. We also have dogs and they like to eat anything so they wouldn't survive in our yard. I am attracted to this particular orchid because of the colorful flowers, light fragrance and the banana bulbs which remind me of my banana palms at home and look cool and interesting. Over the time that I will be at Orchid Club I hopefully will be able to learn some more interesting facts about this specific orchid with my orchid mentor, Trevor Garard. As I mentioned above, this orchid came from and is a native of Brazil. At Willunga High School our orchids are grown in a 50% shade house near the Aboriginal garden where native orchids are also grown with a mixture of other plants. We have our *Bifrenaria harrisoniae* hanging from the roof of our shade house. It is currently growing in a small pot and medium soil. The pot is 120mm and the medium is made of 10mm coconut husk. The Orchid Club at Willunga High School is a lot of fun and has lots of interactive stuff to do which includes cleaning pots in bleach with an apron, gloves and face helmet on. I was the second person to do this job and I didn't want to take off the mask so I wore it until the end of the lesson. We also have the opportunity to care for our own orchids with some people having no flowers and people with some flowers and then me who has lots of flowers. We also water, fertilize and adjust the height of our flowers ourselves while caring for our group plant which is going to orchid shows. Apart from the orchid that I am writing about, I currently have no other favourites but hopefully I will have a lot more favourite orchids that I will like. I would also like to mention that I am happy and excited about the new combination of two plants that we will later hopefully see flower. The Willunga High School Club mentor Trevor Garard has used *Bifrenaria harrisoniae* in a hybridising program. He has put pollen from the *Bifrenaria* onto *Propabstopetalum* Kiwi Sunrise. Our Orchid Club will be getting some of the progeny from this great combination or cross. I have heard that this cross has never been made before and I am looking forward to seeing this great combination towards the end of this year. Lastly I would like to thank Trevor Garard and Mr. Glass [Jeff Glass] for their support through this essay.

[Acknowledgment: *Our sincere thanks to Dale Borders for allowing us to use his images to illustrate this article.*]