



Victorian (Australia) C.P. Society 1985 Show.

Photo by David Bond.

Nepenthes × *dominii* and var. *intermedia*

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Nepenthes × *dominii* was the first man-made *Nepenthes* hybrid crossed by Dominy around the late 1850s, and was first exhibited at the Royal Horticultural Society show at South Kensington in June of 1862. A few years later, a sleek clone was given a variety name of *intermedia* by Court, a close friend of Dominy. The descriptions for print of both plants was written by Veitch and go something like this: Stem purplish, slightly downy, leaves are lanceolate and 16-18" x 3", one nerved, decurrent and petiolate. Pitchers up to 6", lid spotted, high neck peristome, lid faintly flushed above and freely spotted below. Much more green on pitcher than red. The descriptions for both plants are almost identical and Veitch mentions they are a favorite of easy culture.

N. × *dominii* was the beginning of the man-made hybrid area in this field opening the door for future works. Finding out quickly that hybrids were fertile and capable of hybrid crossing, multi-parent stock could be created. This was an instant stimulant to collectors to produce new material as getting specimens from the wild was still very difficult during those times. Many of the early hybrids made proved to be heartier than many of the wild forms.

Since it was still very early in the "Victorian" age of *Nepenthes*, a number of collected plants that were very similar (small, greenish and unattractive) were not noticed and remained in greenhouse collections unnamed or unidentified for years. They were not considered of any use to hybridizers due to their "common" appearance.

The original plants (both male and female) of *N. × dominii* and var. *intermedia* have survived until modern times. After many years of lack of interest and neglect, *N. × dominii* var. *intermedia* simply became known as *N. × intermedia*. Today, I've seen both clones in collections under an array of erroneous names such as *N. × hookeriana-cult.*, *N. × balfouriana* (now extinct) *N. × boissiensis* and *N. × courtii*, all being the same plant. To make the problem worse, a few field collected natural hybrids of *N. gracilis* × *N. rafflesiana* have had the title of *N. × dominii* placed upon them. This is, of course, totally improper.

Today's *N. × dominii* and var. *intermedia* fit the original description and line drawings; they are often hard to get to pitcher, needing more humidity than most, and much less light as well. These freely vining plants are very hearty and can handle cool weather better than most *Nepenthes* hybrids and species; perhaps this is why these clones survived all these years when many others died out.

The main problem with *N. × dominii* and var. *intermedia* is that the parent crossed with *N. rafflesiana* is not certain. The original description says "*Nepenthes rafflesiana* breed with a common Bornean species, possibly *N. gracilis*." However, today many natural hybrids (as well as man-made ones and backcrosses) between *N. rafflesiana* and *N. gracilis* are in cultivation. None is similar to *N. × dominii* at all. Perhaps the Bornean species was *N. mirabilis*, again many field-collected natural hybrids, backcrosses and man-made material fail to look even close to *N. × dominii*. The leading characteristic that *N. mirabilis* carries over into its many hybrids is the lacinate leaf edge margins, always visible at least on pitcherless leaves and is not in the make-up of *N. × dominii* at all. It has been said that this *N. × dominii* has *N. ampullaria* in its make-up and is a *N. × hookeriana*. In the 150 years since this cross, no other *N. rafflesiana* × *N. ampullaria* cross, man-made or natural, has looked like *N. × dominii*. When *N. × dominii* was made, *N. × hookeriana* was still

considered a species. Not until 1908 was it thought of as a natural hybrid. Line drawings of those times indicate that the *N. × hookeriana* "Victorian" was the same as the field collected specimens we have now. So now we must consider what other non-attractive Bornean *Nepenthes* species could have been used in that cross back then. Veitch, when describing the plants for print, questioned the *N. gracilis* parentage. Knowing Dominy and what was available at that time, he speculated that *N. hirsuta* was used. I must totally agree with this; there are many *N. hirsuta* characteristics in *N. × dominii* and var. *intermedia*, and *N. hirsuta* has never again been crossed with *N. rafflesiana*. So further proof would involve making this cross again in the greenhouse and checking for rather obvious similar looking offspring. *N. × dominii* and var. *intermedia* have the ability to survive in the cooler conditions and lower light levels in which *N. hirsuta* is found in the wild. The shape of the hybrid's pitcher is a half way step between *N. rafflesiana* and *N. hirsuta* and is fuzzy, like *N. hirsuta*. The stem of the hybrid is purplish and has a fine hairy texture as in *N. hirsuta*, but reduced. The leaves are large and very much like *N. rafflesiana*, with the presence, again, of a hairy texture like in *N. hirsuta* but reduced. With all plants considered, *Nepenthes × dominii* and var. *intermedia* appears to be a *N. rafflesiana* × *N. hirsuta* cross. Now all we need do is duplicate the hybrid and prove it.

References

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