

LEPTOTES

Leptotes is a genus of 5 or 6 dwarf epiphytes related to Laelias and Cattieyas from Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. In habit they resemble miniature Brassavolas, with small cylindrical leaves on short pseudobulbs thrust up from a rambling rhizome. The flowers are open and star-shaped, often cupping forward. Their charm certainly lies in their diminutive size and relatively large, showy flowers.

Two species, *Lpt. b/co/orand* *Lpt. unicolor*, are reasonably well-known. *Leptotes bicolor* is the larger, with 4-5" leaves and white flowers with a magenta lip. Its flowers have a unique habit of effacing up. This, coupled with its early spring flowering, has caused some to dub it the crocus orchid. Unfortunately it tends to wander a bit with long spaces between growths.

I personally find *Lpt. un/co/orand* the more charming. Its leaves are but 1-2" long, the flowers an inch or so across, of a lovely, soft pink. The growths are much more closely spaced, flowering for me November through January with typically 2 flowers per growth.

Less commonly seen are *Lpt. tenuis*, *Lpt. paranaensis*, and *Lpt. serrulata*.

Very little hybridizing has been done with these charmers. An old and curious cross is credited to Veitch in 1902, crossing *Lpt. fa/coto* with *Laelia cinnabarina*. More recent attempts have been made in the 70's and '80's, with crosses to *Brassavola nodosa*, *Cattleya aurantiaca* and *C. b/co/orand* *Epidendrum pseudepidendrum*. Perhaps more rewarding were the mini-cat hybrids made with *Laelia pumila* and L Gold Star, giving us *Leptolaelia* Leprechaun and L JttJe Star respectively. Our neighbor Don Crawford registered the primary hybrid *Leptotes Menina* by crossing *un/co/orand* *tenuis*.

The two common species are easy of culture, wanting only 1 1/2-2 thousand foot candles of light, and intermediate temperatures. They do seem to grow best on mounts, showing a preference for bark in my experience. But being so small, they easily adapt to pot culture, but day pots with lots of drainage material beneath an open mix will probably work best. *Lpt bicolor*'s tendency to ramble means effectively chopping it apart every few years to keep it in bounds in a pot. The good news is that even a rambling *Lpt. bicolor* is a lot smaller and easier to grow than a Vanilla vine, and its seed pods also contain vanillin.

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