

# Calanthe

*Calanthes* are beautiful orchids with tall flower spikes in warm red, brown and yellow combinations. They are increasingly popular and some are frost hardy in Denmark. Most *calanthes* grow naturally on the floors of warm-temperate or subtropical forests, which is why they do not like wind, dry air or direct sun. In the garden, they should have only a bit of morning- or evening sun. Garden *calanthes* come from Asian climates with warm summers, plenty of summer rain, and mild, dry winters or winters with a good snow cover. This is very different from the cold Danish summers and the wet and unreliable winters where a warm period may be followed by hard frost. In Denmark, the *calanthes* should therefore be grown in covered frames to avoid winter wet and the shoots should be protected the by a generous winter mulch with pine duff.



*Calanthe sieboldii* may start growing in the greenhouse already in January if the winter is warm. I bring it inside in an unheated room when the flowerspikes appear.



*Calanthe sieboldii* is one of the showier species in this genus and grows multiple shoots within a year or two.

I cover the cold frames with a transparent plastic plate from mid November to the beginning of April. *Calanthes* prefer slightly acidic conditions and become chlorotic if there is lime in the soil. They also do not like compact soil that has too little oxygen for the roots, especially in winter. The compost in my garden frames is therefore a mixture of pine bark chips, pine duff, and coarse, lumpy sphagnum peat.

*C. tricarinata* and *C. brevicornu* are the most reliable of my *calanthes*. They tolerate the Danish climate reasonably well, probably because they come from higher elevation than most others, above 3000 meters, which is where we also find other fully hardy Asian orchids. *C. hancockii* and *C. davidii* are also from high elevation, but they didn't last long in my garden — the problem was likely the inexperienced gardener rather than the plants. *C.*

*alpina* may also be fully hardy as it is found up to 3500 m, but my plants are only small protocorms in flasks, so it will take some years before they can be tested in the garden. The other *calanthes* grow from medium to low elevations, with the popular *C. sieboldii* growing only to 1500 m, and may not survive extreme winters. Taught by experience, I now keep divisions of the half-hardy *calanthes* in a frost-free room indoor. I grow them in 2.5-L pots in half rockwool grow-cubes, half coarse moler cat litter.

Table 1. *Calanthe* species sorted by maximum elevation.

Species	Elevation (m)	Reference
<i>C. hancockii</i>	3600	2
<i>C. tricarinata</i>	3500	1,2
<i>C. alpina</i>	3500	1,2
<i>C. davidii</i>	3300	2
<i>C. brevicornu</i>	2700, 3100	1,2
<i>C. fugangensis</i>	3000	2
<i>C. densiflora</i>	3000	2
<i>C. nipponica</i>	2600	1,2
<i>C. arcuata</i>	2500, 3100	1,2
<i>C. puberula</i>	2500, 3000	1,2
<i>C. simplex</i>	2600	2
<i>C. reflexa</i>	2500	2
<i>C. plantaginea</i>	2500	2
<i>C. aristulifera</i>	2500	2
<i>C. mannii</i>	2400	2
<i>C. triplicata</i>	1200, 2400	1,2
<i>C. graciliflora</i>	1500, 2400	1,2
<i>C. sieboldii</i>	1500	1
<i>C. discolor</i>	1500	1

*Calanthe* species and hybrids have become increasingly available the last years, but there is great confusion about the naming. Many misnamed clones seem to originate from the mass producer Anthura, sometimes referred to as "Anthura cabbage". They are often lovely plants with phenomenal growth and worth trying outside in a cold frame though not all will survive.

*Calanthes* are easy to germinate from green pods or mature seeds. As for temperature, follow the usual cycle with 2-5 degrees C during winter months and place under LED-light when the leaves develop in spring. I grow the seedling in the same compost as the parents: half rockwool grow cubes and half moler cat litter, or sometimes half pine bark, half sphagnum peat.



*Calanthe tricarinata* is the only *Calanthe* species that flowers reliably in my Danish garden.

#### References

1. Singchi C, Zhanhuo T, Yibo L. 1999 Native orchids of China in color. Science Press, New York – Beijing.
2. Flora of China ([http://www.efloras.org/flora\\_page.aspx?flora\\_id=2](http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=2))



*Calanthe arcuata*



*Calanthe tricarinata* seedlings on liquid fertilizer medium.



Slugs love *Calanthe*. A division of the hybrid below after two months in the garden.



Cheap, unspecified *Calanthe* hybrids can often be found at garden centers in spring. This one multiplies very fast and a division has flowered well for a few years in an outdoor frame.