

Cameron, K: **Vanilla Orchids, Natural History and Cultivation**. - Timber Press, Portland - London 2011. 212 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-88192-989-8.

The topics of the book spans from simple introduction of *Vanilla* plant and *Vanilla* spice to common reader, through botanical characteristics and taxonomy, history of cultivation, recent cultivation methods and harvest processing up to utilisation of *Vanilla* pods in food preparation.

The text of the book is divided into ten chapters. In the Introduction the author explains the basic botanical characteristics of *Vanilla* that is the only species from *Orchideaceae* family that gives us spice and is used in the kitchen. In chapter one – Origin and History of Domesticated *Vanilla* – are mapped historical and geographical origins of *Vanilla planifolia*, the most practically important species from this family. Overview of history begins with pre-Columbian era in Mexico and finished with *Vanilla* recent cultivation in nearly all tropical regions of the world. In the next chapter, taxonomical relations within vanilloid orchids are explained and their distribution during last 60 - 100 million years evolution from the appearance of the first vanilloid orchids.

Plants of genus *Vanilla* and their relatives are known from many tropical areas of the world, but some plants from this group were found even in the temperate North America. The subfamily *Vanilloideae* is not simple group from the taxonomical point of view. There is no single character unites all species in the subfamily or distinguishes it from the remainder orchids.

Vanilla planifolia is tree climbing plant. Knowledge of plant anatomy and life strategy is important for commercial cultivation as well as for garden cultivation. *Vanilla* plants are grown not only in spice producing plantations, but also in greenhouse or at home as ornamental plants without difficulties. Gardener may grow it as epiphytic plant, or in the soil like common ornamentals. In artificial condition of greenhouse or home the *Vanilla* plants flower very rarely, but plants are decorative with its leaves and climbing grown character. In regions of original geographical distribution the *Vanilla* plants flower and create pods normally. But out of this region, cultivated *Vanilla* plants must be hand-pollinated, because of absence of insects adapted for *Vanilla* fertilisation. The separate chapter describe the interesting and complicated history of hand-pollination from the first trying to common present-day artificial pollination.

Quality of *Vanilla* pods depend on proper harvesting and processing, as reader come to known step by step in the next chapter. In the text are also some of cooking recipes for *Vanilla* use.

The book includes Checklist of All Currently Recognized *Vanilla* Species and Checklist of Synonyms, Selected Bibliography and Index.

The book has 64 colour plates illustrated all topics mentioned in the text.

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