

Orchid plant size definitions vary a great deal, depending partly on who you are speaking with, and partly upon which plant you are talking about.



Considering that some plants can bloom in 18-30 months from flask (Phalaenopsis & mini-Cattleyas), while others can take up to 12-16 years (multi-floral Paphiopedilum), it is impossible to apply the same nomenclature to both ends of the spectrum.

Likewise, for slippers (Paphiopedilums and Phragmipediums), which are often sold by **LS** (= leaf span size), you need to have some idea about how large the plant is expected to grow. A seedling that is 15-20 cm (= 6-8") across is:

- ◆ Blooming size if *Paph bellatulum* or *niveum*.
- ◆ About 2 years to BS if *Paph villosum* or *insigne*.
- ◆ Many years away if *Paph Bel Royal* (*rothschildianum* x *kolopakingii*), which grows to about 36" across.

Most reputable sellers will use a scale, that looks something like this:

- **Seedling** A vague term, must be clarified further, usually with estimate of number of years to BS.

For Paphiopedilum & Phragmipedium, often clarified with a **LS size** (= leaf span), which can be stated in either cm or inches (1" = 2.54 cm). To be meaningful, you need to know how large that type of plant needs to be before it is BS.

- **NBS** = **Near Blooming Size**
Generally = 12-24 months to first bloom. Thus, most true mini Cattleya are NBS coming out of the flask!
- **BS** = **Blooming Size**
Generally expected to bloom in the next 12 months. Either on the present or the next new growth, or the next time that plant is in season (for example, *Cattleya labiata* blooms in the fall).

For all of these size descriptions, understand that the seller is basing the estimate on continued growth in his/her greenhouse. In your house or under lights, it might take a little longer.

E-Bay

Many interested and high quality orchids are offered for sale on E-Bay. Most E-Bay sellers follow standards similar to those outlined above. However, there is a significant minority, who take serious liberties with their size descriptions.

I have seen *Rhy gigantea* seedlings with 2-3" leaf span described as near 'blooming size', or even 'blooming size'. In reality 2" plants are 4-8 years from reaching BS.

There is another aspect to this issue. I have some sellers under suspicion for driving small seedlings into bloom, by using chemical treatment. Thus, they can claim that *Rhy gigantea* with a 5-6" leaf span is BS. In reality, when grown naturally, this species grows to 16-28" across.

There is another scale of sizes, which needs to be understood:

BS vs Mature vs Large vs Specimen

This is an area, where I feel, that more sellers are taking liberties. The way I understand, and use, these terms is:

- Blooming Size:** Plant is realistically expected to bloom on the most recent, or the next new, growth.
- Mature:** This plant has bloomed before, and it has reached full height. If a Cattleya, it can have from 1 to 3 leads.
- Large:** This is a plant with multiple leads. If a Cattleya, it should have 3-6 or more leads.
- Specimen Size:** This is the term most often abused. It should only be used to describe truly gigantic plants. If a Cattleya, I would expect it to have 10 or more leads.

Here *Den thyrsiflorum* to illustrate:



MATURE



SPECIMEN SIZE