

When will this plant bloom?

Sdlg - NBS - BS - Mature - Specimen/Divisions

These are subjective terms, which some plant people use rather liberally. From a responsible vendor, you should expect each term to mean:

Sdlg : Seedling = 2 or more years to the first bloom (to be clarified by the seller). Some seedlings can take 10+ years to reach BS (such as Paph. sanderianum).
(also used for meristems in this context)

NBS : **Near Blooming Size** = less than 1 year to BS (=> 12-18 months to first bloom).

BS : **Blooming Size** = capable of blooming on next growth (=> within 6-12 months).

Mature : It has bloomed at least once (or, that the plant is in bud).

Specimen : Plant has bloomed for several years, it has multiple leads (Vandas = one or more basal keikis, Paphiopedilums = multi-growth).

Let's elaborate a little. Most vendors express these terms based on the time it will take them to grow the plants to each larger stage. In a greenhouse, this will occur faster than most home growers can achieve under lights or on the window sills. So, do not be discouraged if a NBS seedling takes 24-30 months to produce that first bloom.

And, if you buy on Ebay or Etsy, do not be surprised if it takes even longer. Many internet vendors use the above terms rather freely. To illustrate this, I did a quick search on *Rlc. George King 'Serendipity'*.

**Seller #1, BS,
\$74.99 opening bid**



Seller #2, BS, opening bid \$34.00

This photo shows a 2.1/2" or 3" pot, so this plant is actually 2 1/2-5 years from BS.



Seller #1 is **Waldor Orchids**. Photo includes a Coke can for size reference; no complaints, plant is certainly BS (in sheath).

Seller #2 is **nia22d**, located in Hammonton, NJ. The photo includes no size reference, but based on the fingers & bark nuggets, I believe that this plant is in a 2 1/2" or 3" pot. *Rlc. George King* is a full size standard *Cattleya*, so that translates into 2 1/2-5 years to first bloom, depending upon the conditions the buyer can provide.

You can get some excellent plants on Ebay, but you have to study the photos carefully to avoid getting 'took'. The above plant is in good condition, but it is nowhere near NBS, let alone BS.

I did another search on *Rhyncholaelia digbyana*, which revealed a broad variety of plants:



Seller plantsshopdx

Description: 6" pot, BS,

Buy It Now: \$45.00

Shipping: \$12.56

No photo of the actual plant for sale.



Seller marblekg

Description: 6" pot, HUGE

Buy It Now: \$200.00

Shipping: \$50.00

This seller has a bad rep. Many of his plants have virus (I say this from personal experience, about 5 times).



Seller orchidspot

Description: Large plant

Opening bid: \$55.00

Shipping: \$14.00

This looks like a division from a larger plant, potted in a 4" or 4½" pot.

The new growth is not quite as large as the pre-division growths. It will take 1-2 years to get it to BS.

Now, let's talk about the differences between **BS, Mature & Specimen**. The standard definition of **BS**, is a plant capable of blooming on the next growth. However, keep in mind that a first blooming is often less than what the plant is capable of doing, once it matures and eventually grows up to specimen size.



May 2013

Some years ago, I elected to track the progress of a small **Ascocentrum Mona Church** = *miniaturum* x *ampullaceum* (now reclassified as a **Vanda** = *miniata* x *ampullacea*). Purchased as seedling in a 2¼" pot in 2012, it bloomed for the first time in 2013. This NBS seedling managed to produce a small spike with some 6-8 buds.

The following year (2014), the



May 2014



**April 2015
July 2015
Sept 2015**

plant is now BS, so it produced a spike with some 15-20 buds (a few got knocked off going to an OS meeting before I took the photo).

The third year (2015) the plant is now fully mature, and produced its first spike with the num-

ber of buds it is actually capable of doing (25+ buds).

Not only was it now producing to capacity, but as a mature plant it proved another point by blooming **three times in one season**.

This is a common performance by mature Vandas; I have several of these, which bloom 3-4 times annually, and often with 2-3 inflorescences simultaneously; here **Vanda Wirat Gordon**:



I am getting a similar performance from **Vanda Pachara Delight 'Pachara' AM/AOS**, which is approaching the specimen stage, with one basal keiki that has started to bloom and a second keiki forming.

The most extreme example is my **Vanda Ambrosian Delight 'Fair Orchids' AM/AOS**. This plant is now some 36-40" tall, and it blooms 8-10 times annually (from every single leaf axil).

Considering the makeup of most collections, you are unlikely to have to divide a Vanda very often. If you do, it is usually either a top cutting, or removing a basal keiki - both of which should have roots. Dividing Cattleyas requires more consideration; the first being whether you should **divide or not?**

Once you have a mature plant (approaching specimen size), it is tempting to divide it. You certainly can, but once you do, you will set the plant back, and you will not get the same flower production in the following year.

If you look at the Rhyncholaelia digbyana photos, the plant on the plastic chair is certainly large enough to divide. But it is also an example of a plant that was put into a 'too small' container last time it was repotted. Instead of a 6" basket, he should have used an 8" or 10" basket. When you do, you can produce a true specimen size plant such as this one:



This plant was in a 2½" pot in January 2018; from there it went into a 4" net pot in October. In 2020 I put that net pot into the center of a 10" basket, and filled the basket with *Aliflor* nuggets (LECA). By June 2023 it had outgrown the 10" basket. Since I did not have time to make a larger basket, I divided the plant, which produced:

- 3 multi-lead divisions,
- 11 single lead divisions
- 6 backbulb divisions

Even though my digbyana bloomed 4 times from July 2022 to February 2023, I do not expect any flowers for the next 12 months due to the repotting & dividing.

If you must divide (either the plant has become unmanageable, or you have promised someone a division), Cattleya divisions should have a minimum of 4 mature pseudobulbs (PB) with a front lead. Such plants may or may not bloom on the next growth. To improve on odds for getting flowers the year of repotting, each division should have 2-3 front leads and min. 6-8 PBs.

A specimen size Cattleya with 6-8 leads can easily be divided into 3 or 4 plants. However, such smaller divisions will only do a single growth from each lead the first year after being divided. If you leave the plant alone (or repot without dividing), it will likely produce 12-15 new growths, and twice as many flowers.

Sidebar: Some Cattleyas only produce a single new growth each year. That makes it difficult to share divisions, other than separating some backbulbs next time you repot.

A more effective approach, is to cut the rhizome while the plant is still in the pot. This tends to produce larger side growths, which can then be separated next time you repot.



Here Rlc. Malworth. I cut the rhizome with a clean razor blade about 2 months before photos were taken, separating 3 healthy backbulbs.

Dividing other genera:

Bulbophyllum	Min. 4 PB
Cymbidium	Min. 3 PB
Dendrobium	Min. 3-4 canes
Oncidium/Miltonia	Min. 2 PB
Paphiopedilum	1-3 fans (must have roots*)
Phragmipedium	1-2 fans (must have roots)

* *Paphiopedilum* are notorious for not producing new roots on new fans. It can take 2 or 3 years before the roots appear, so the smallest divisions possible are often 3 or 4 fans.