



Hardy lady's slipper orchids for the garden

MICHAEL WEINERT discusses the
new *Cypripedium* hybrids that are
easy to grow and readily available

Cypripedium Ventricosum 'Pastel' growing with
ferns, Solomon's seal and wood anemones
Michael Weinert



CYPRIPEDIUMS ARE probably the most striking orchids that can be grown in temperate gardens. However, in the past, they have suffered from the double disadvantage of being difficult and expensive to obtain, and hard to grow. Until recently, cyripediums offered for sale have unfortunately often been of poor quality. Many orchid enthusiasts who bought them have been disappointed and felt they spent a lot for no result. So new offers meet with justified scepticism.

A new direction

In 1997 I founded the nursery Frosch Exclusive Perennials in Germany and introduced vigorous and easy-to-grow *Cypripedium* hybrids to the market. After 10 years of growing terrestrial orchids as a hobby, I decided to propagate large numbers of promising *Cypripedium* hybrids for garden enthusiasts. Now, a selection of high-quality crosses is offered every

year. They are far easier to grow, and to obtain, than rare and often temperamental species. I registered a trademark so that Frosch® *Cypripedium* hybrids can be recognised when shopping from plant catalogues. Only good plants of flowering size are sold under this mark. The name is in honour of the famous German *Cypripedium* breeder Werner Frosch.

As all the plants are grown outside in the rough climate of upper Bavaria, they are totally hardy, and are not sold until they have been grown on for four to five years. These hybrids are living proof that not all cyripediums are delicate and expensive. The nursery (www.cypripedium.de) offers only hybrids and no species because:

- Hybrid *Cypripedium* are absolutely hardy (to at least -20°C) and need no special winter protection
 - They are not very demanding and are much easier to grow in the garden, as well as being much more vigorous.
- For example, three *Cypripedium*

Gisela planted in a garden near Munich produced 25 flowers after only five years, 152 flowers after eight and nearly 250 flowers after nine years

- The hybrid plants are invariably the result of artificial propagation so there is no pressure on wild *Cypripedium* plants.

New hybrids for 2008

The two following hybrids are new to the Frosch® plant list this year.

***Cypripedium Ventricosum* 'Pastel'**

This is a wonderful hybrid with ivory-coloured flowers that may have some red mottling on the petals, depending on the year and on the particular plant. This cross means that the highly desirable ivory colour of the natural hybrid *Cypripedium x ventricosum* (*C. calceolus* x *C. macranthos*) is now available through artificial propagation.

The broad leaves and strong stem make it a very stable garden plant that can even withstand strong rain or

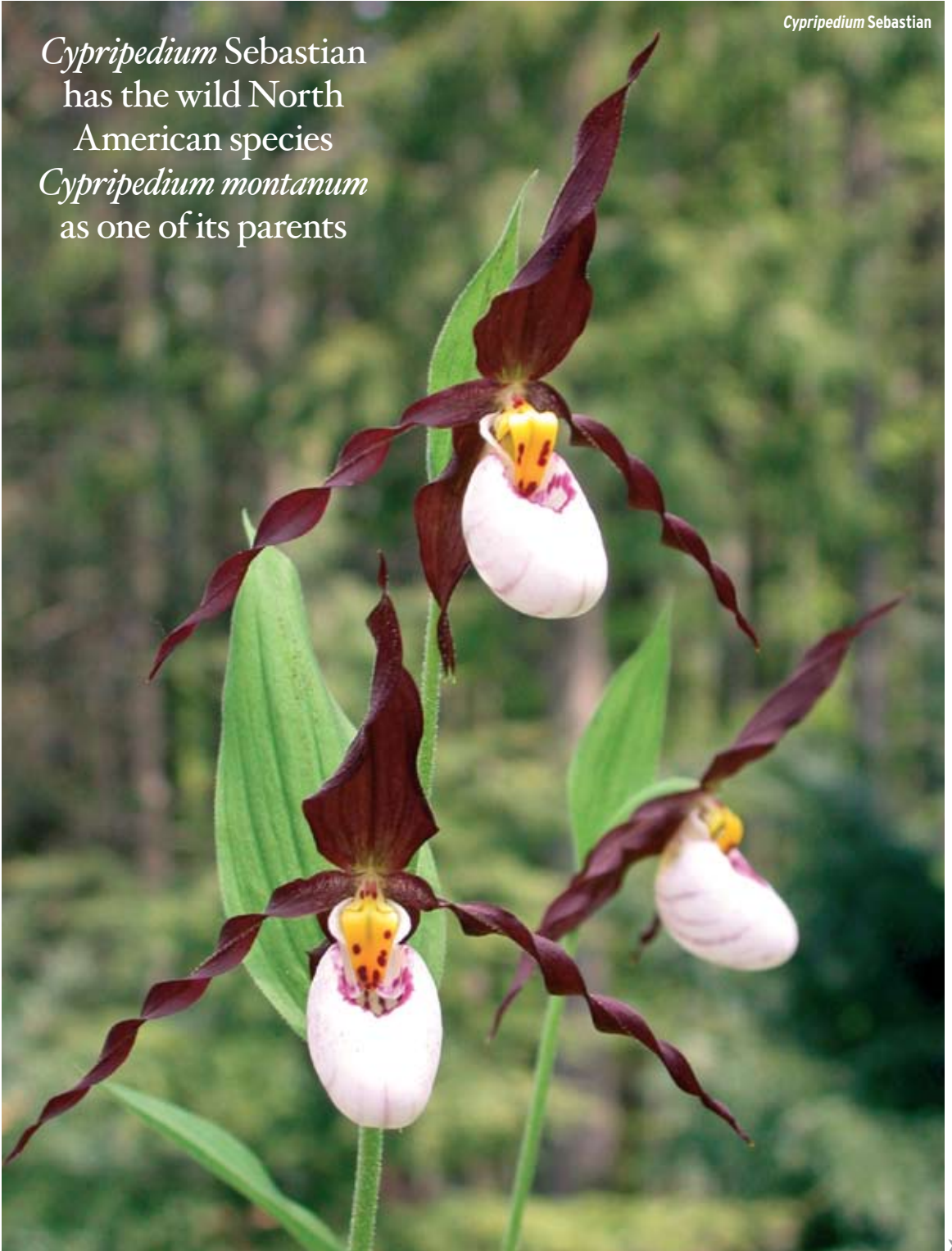


Cypripedium Ventricosum 'Pastel' has variable red spots

Saskia Urban

Cypripedium Sebastian

Cypripedium Sebastian
has the wild North
American species
Cypripedium montanum
as one of its parents



Michael Wehnert



Sebastian Urban

Cypripedium hybrids flourishing under Japanese maples, from left, *C. Ventricosum* 'Pastel', *C. Sebastian*, *C. Ventricosum*, *C. Sabine* and *C. Sunny*

wind. It grows 40–55cm tall and forms impressive clumps within a few years. I recommend it highly.

Crosses like this and the following one enable terrestrial orchid enthusiasts to buy hybrids that look like species and so help to save the wild populations. These hybrid plants have the additional benefit of being at far less risk of dying in the first few years of garden cultivation.

***Cypripedium* Sebastian**

This elegant hybrid catches the eye with the striking shape and colour of its flowers, and the elegant growth of its shoots. It is reminiscent of the wild North American species *Cypripedium montanum*, which is one of its parents. *C. Sebastian* is likely to remain a rare hybrid as *C. montanum* is difficult to cultivate and so hybrid seed cannot be produced on a regular basis.

Cypripedium Sebastian is a free-flowering grex, often with two blooms per stem and, like all Frosch® hybrids, is easy to grow in the garden.

It grows up to 60cm tall and flowers in the second half of May.

How and where to grow them

Cypripedium hybrids can be grown in all areas where temperatures rarely exceed 30°C in summer, and night temperatures remain below 5°C for two to three months in winter. With some snow cover, they can even survive temperatures lower than -20°C.

The planting site should be in semi-shade, with no direct sun at midday, such as on the north side of a building. Most *cypripediums* are woodland plants and so prefer cool sites that do not become too hot and dry in summer. If ferns thrive, so will lady's slipper orchids. They need a well-aerated, crumbly soil, moist but not wet. If the planting site is too wet, a drainage layer of crushed clay pebbles or lava should be added. In sandy soils, which dry out rapidly, the addition of perlite or vermiculite will help water retention. A mulch of beech leaves or conifer needles is also helpful.

Autumn is the best season for planting. I recommend spreading out the roots in the upper 10cm of the soil, with the rhizome 2–3cm below the surface, so that only the tip of the shoot bud is visible. Do not over-compress the soil, and water thoroughly – the ground should never dry out completely. Plants should be fertilised regularly in spring, using a commercial mineral fertiliser at half strength. Slugs are a menace – they can wreak havoc in a single night – and protective measures are essential, particularly in spring when the new growth is developing.

Cypripediums should not be planted close to trees or large shrubs because of the competition for water and nutrients. They look best in combination with slow-growing ferns and other shade-loving plants such as epimediums and small hostas.

MICHAEL WEINERT has grown hardy orchids since 1987. He founded and runs Frosch Exclusive Perennials