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What Makes an Orchid an Orchid

All orchids have 3 sepals and 3 petals. One of the petals is modified and is called the lip or labellum. In some orchids some of these parts are reduced or fused. The 2 lateral sepals of *Paphiopedilum* are fused and called synsepal. The petals and lip of *Masdevallia* are greatly reduced and the sepals are broadly joined, giving the flowers their distinctive triangular shape.

There are some plants which bear flowers greatly resembling orchids in this arrangement of flower parts. To truly identify an orchid, one must look at the reproductive parts: the stigma (female) and the anthers (male). These are separate in most flowers, but fused in orchids. In orchids, the structure bearing reproductive parts is called the column.

