

# Beat the winter blues at annual orchid exhibition

By [Sonel Cutler](#) and [Ashley Soebroto](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated February 3, 2023, 11:42 a.m.



Beallara is one of the orchid hybrids on display at this year's orchid exhibition at the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston. MEGAN STOUFFER

In the midst of a Massachusetts winter finally showing its bite, orchids are in season.

It would seem to be an oddity to open a flower exhibition during this time of the year, but when it comes to the [New England Botanic Garden](#), it's the “perfect time for orchids,” according to CEO Grace Elton.

The New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill in Boylston is set to unveil its annual orchid exhibition Feb. 11, combining the art and science behind the vibrant flora. Running until March 19, "[Allure: An Orchid Exhibition](#)" will illuminate the relationship between orchids and pollinators.

"We wanted to combine art and science," said exhibition manager Lea Morgan. "This is kind of giving us a visual and a really beautiful way of getting an up-close look of the orchids."

The exhibit will display thousands of orchids, including 14 different genera and hybrids with colors spanning across the rainbow.

"I want people to really appreciate the complexity of the genres of orchids and how wildly different they can be from each other," said Megan Varnes, NEBG's conservatory horticulturist.



Behind the scenes at the New England Botanic Garden, horticulturist Megan Varnes has prepared about 2,000 orchids for the exhibition. MEGAN STOUFFER

The show also will integrate sculptures from California-based artist Kara Walker, according to Morgan. The statues will depict various orchid species with anatomically accurate visuals.

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“It’s a really interesting way of pulling art and someone’s sculptural abilities to do something very accurate,” Morgan said. “We wanted to tie that together with something a little more science-based and visually beautiful.”

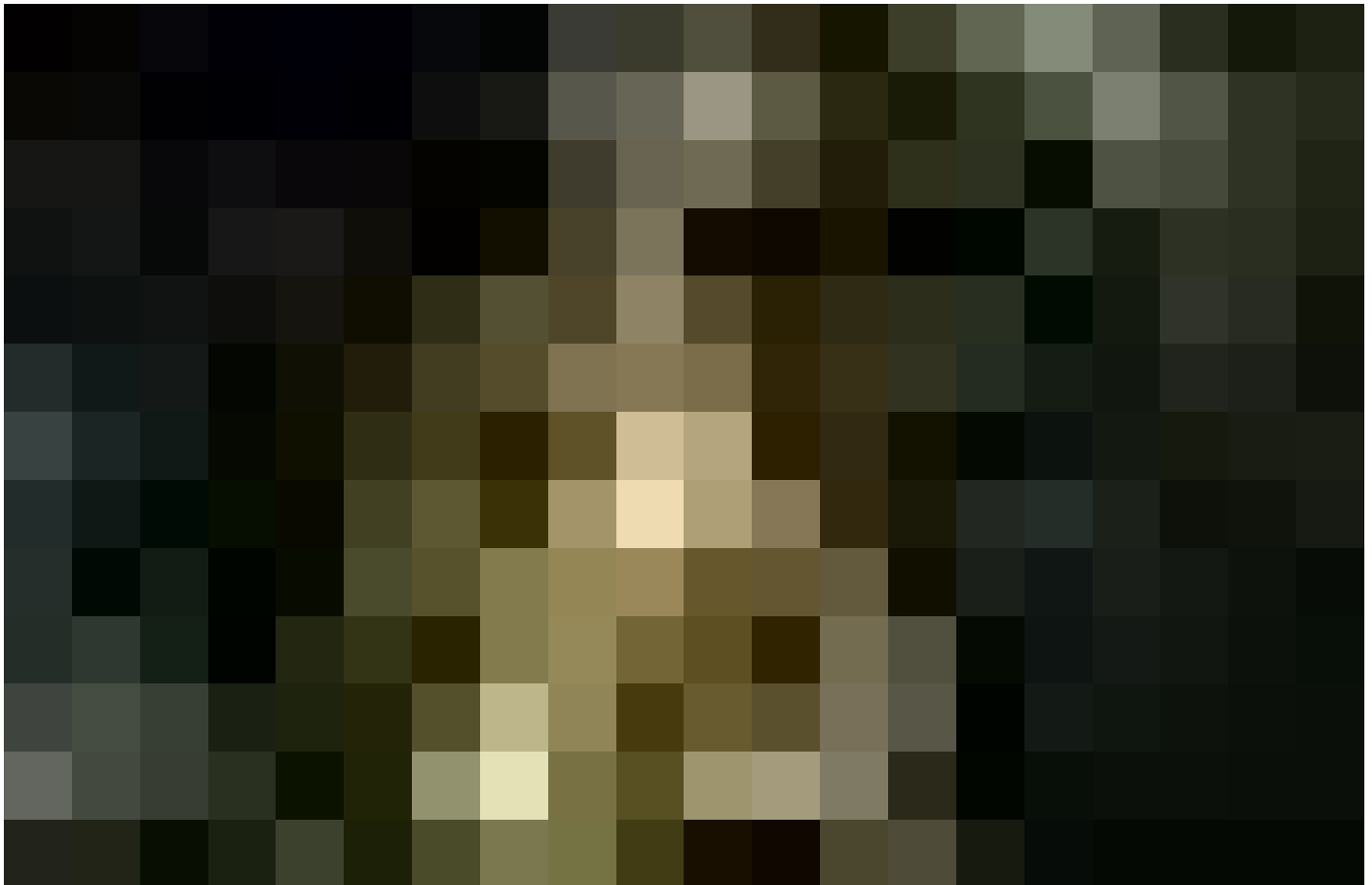
Staff begins planning for the yearly exhibition more than a year in advance. A total of more than 2,000 orchids are ordered from Hawaii and Canada in August and arrive about a month before the show begins. NEGB gardeners maintain and nurture the flowers in greenhouses, where floors are hosed down to increase humidity and warmth in the air.

“Once they go out into the exhibit, it’s a little bit more challenging,” Varnes said. “That’s where we lean on our volunteers.”

But the flowers aren't done growing once the show concludes in March. Elton said after the exhibition, the orchids that were on display will be sold to visitors so they can create their own botanic gardens.

“Along with trying to teach people about the amazing relationships between the orchids and our pollinators that we were talking about, we also want to tell people about growing this amazing group of plants in their own home,” Elton said.

Orchid pollinators range from birds, moths, butterflies, bees, wasps, and flies.



Brassidium are one species of orchids on display at the annual orchid exhibition. MEGAN STOUFFER

While the daytime exhibit is general admission, the botanic garden also offers an after-hours experience for those looking to see the orchid displays in a different light.

On Fridays from Feb. 17 to March 17, visitors can also experience the exhibit during the evening through the garden's "Orchids After Dark" series. The garden will provide live jazz from local musicians, a cash bar, and light bites to eat.

Elton said she hopes the exhibit will provide an escape from the frigid temperatures outside.

“Conservatories really feed my soul during the winter,” she said. “I really want people to see us as a respite. If they are getting the winter blues and need to feel humidity and smell amazing orchids, they come here for that reason.”

*Some of the dates already have sold out. Remaining tickets for Orchids After Dark are \$20 for members, \$30 for nonmembers. Daytime admission for nonmembers ranges from \$8 to \$18. Visit [nebg.org](https://nebg.org) or call 508-869-6111.*

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