



Typuspflanze von *Sobralia rogersiana*  
 The type plant of *Sobralia rogersiana*  
 Züchter / grower:  
 B. ROGERS / T. ROOT

## Notes on the *Sobralia macrantha* complex



*Sobralia rogersiana*  
 Züchter / grower:  
 D. BORDERS

Eric CHRISTENSON  
 discusses some of the  
 problems with these showy,  
 yet confusing species

### *Sobralia rogersiana*

***Sobralia rogersiana*** E.A. CHRISTENSON, *spec. nov.*

TYPE: Country unknown (see text), Hort. B. ROGERS, CHRISTENSON Sobralian. (holotype: **US**; isotype: **NY**).

Species haec *Sobralia macrantha* LINDL. similis sed caulibus altioribus, magnifloribus, labello profunde emarginato coloris dissimilis differt.





*Sobralia rogersiana*  
Abbildung aus / illustrated in the  
*Botanical Magazine*  
(als / as *Sobralia macrantha*, t. 4446).

Die weiße Form von /  
The white form of  
*Sobralia rogersiana*  
Züchter / grower: RBG Kew

**Etymology:** Named for San Francisco Bay area *Sobralia* enthusiast and hybridist Bruce ROGERS who provided the type specimens.

Caespitose terrestrials forming large, bamboo-like plants. Roots thick, fleshy. Stems slender, leafy for at least half their upper length, 1.5–2 tall (see text). Leaves lanceolate, long-acuminate, to 35x7.5 cm. Inflorescences terminal, sessile. Flowers solitary, extremely showy, short-lived, magenta, the lip with a white, obcordate throat. Sepals narrowly elliptic-lanceolate, acute, the dorsal sepal to 10x2.5 cm, the lateral sepals to 11x3 cm. Petals elliptic, obtuse, with crenulate, undulate margins, to 10.4x5 cm. Lip obscurely 3-lobed, broadly obovate in outline when expanded, to 15x10.5 cm, tubular and enclosing the column at the base, the limb flared with crenulate, undulate margins, the surface crinkled, the callus of three low raised veins, +/- brown pigmented. Column typical for the genus, 4.5 cm long. Species level taxonomy in *Sobralia* is notoriously difficult as the generally



short-lived flowers make poor museum specimens rendering them difficult to study. Even so, it is somewhat surprising that *Sobralia rogersiana* was included in *Sobralia macrantha*. Plants of *Sobralia rogersiana* are about twice the size of *Sobralia macrantha*

and typically flower when 1.5–2 m tall. Note should be made, however, that the height of *Sobralias* is strongly influenced by light levels. Plants grown in greenhouses or under shade are often up to 50% taller than the corresponding plants in the wild under



brighter light levels. Even so, *Sobralia rogersiana* dwarfs *Sobralia macrantha*.

The flowers are also much larger in *Sobralia rogersiana* than in *Sobralia macrantha*. The flowers of *Sobralia rogersiana* are about 50 % larger in all their measurements relative to true *Sobralia macrantha*. While the color of *Sobralia macrantha* is described as “highly variable” this may be mostly an artifact of historically including more than one species and several hybrids under this name. Certainly available documentation points to *Sobralia rogersiana* having bright magenta flowers rather than the more matte-textured, rose-pink flowers of *Sobralia macrantha*.

The third salient feature of *Sobralia rogersiana* is the shape of the color patch in the throat of the lip. In *Sobralia macrantha* the patch is elliptic with an unbroken curved apex. In contrast, the patch in *Sobralia rogersiana* is heart-shaped with an apical notch (incursion) of purple pigment. This difference in color is consistent and readily separates the two species. That said, there are other species in the complex that also have heart-shaped patches, but none that I have seen with an unbroken curve except *Sobralia macrantha*.

The distribution of *Sobralia rogersiana* is problematic because of the blending of data with *Sobralia macrantha* as well as our general lack of knowledge on *Sobralia* distributions. Certainly *Sobralia rogersiana* is known from Guatemala. LINDLEY (1842) wrote about *Sobralia* “*macrantha*” flowering for the first time in England. He wrote “A flower of the most delicate texture, of the richest crimson, and between seven and eight inches in diameter, growing on the summit of a reedy stem, will give the reader some notion of the magnificence of this rare plant, as it is now flowering in the garden of the Horticultural Society, from specimens sent from Guatemala by Mr. HARTWEG”. A natural hybrid purchased locally in Guatemala supports this distribution (S. BECKENDORF, pers. comm.).

The combining of *Sobralia rogersiana* with *Sobralia macrantha* started with LINDLEY’s comments in 1842 but became the rule starting in 1849 with the publication of an illustration of *Sobralia rogersiana* (as *Sobralia macrantha*) in the standard reference the *Botanical Magazine* (t.4446). This misidentification was never questioned because of the wide dissemination of the *Botanical Magazine* and the rarity (and expense) of BATEMAN’s book. Additional evidence that *Sobralia macrantha* of Victorian growers was actually *Sobralia rogersiana* is shown by contemporary paintings of the time (CRIBB, 1990: 1137).

There are just a few cultivars of *Sobralia rogersiana* in cultivation although it is unclear how many distinct clones these actually represent. The type specimens were prepared from the cultivar ‘Bolen’ which is not uncommon among growers in the San Francisco Bay area. *Sobralia rogersiana* appears to have been in cultivation in California for quite some time (e.g., FITCH, 1978: 26).