Stop 150 Kid’s Tour – Stove House Overview, Vanilla

When this house was built in 1895, a large coal-burning stove sat in the middle of the room. It was used to keep things nice and toasty for the exotic orchids that were being imported here from tropical climates. But the fact is, there are orchids that have adapted to a lot of different environments – some can be found in steamy jungles, some on high mountainsides – and some even grow outdoors in New England! So much for the myth that all orchids are “hot house” flowers! But the tropical orchids in this greenhouse wouldn’t survive outside for long.

It’s easy to understand why orchids are a favorite of flower lovers everywhere. Take a look around at the amazing colors and shapes of their blooms. There’s something for everyone. Orchids belong to one of the largest families of plants on earth - there’s over 17,000 different species of orchids! They can range in size from 1-inch tall plants with teeny-tiny flowers to orchids that have flowers almost 12” big!

Can you find a long vining plant with glossy green leaves? That’s a vanilla orchid. This orchid is grown for more than just its’ incredible flowers, and it’s probably the only orchid that you’ve ever tasted! Vanilla is the second most expensive spice in the world! It takes six months or more for the vine to grow its’ long seed-pods - sometimes called beans. The green beans must be cured with moist and dry heat to develop that wonderful flavor. When they’re finally dry, they turn a dark brown color. Hey! Do you like vanilla ice cream? Well, the next time you have some – just remember, you’ll be eating part of an orchid!