



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

After the Cull

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

Culling your orchid collection to remove the weak sisters is a difficult concept to adopt as your routine practice. It seems natural to want to nurture that ailing orchid back to health. You think you should pot up all those tired backbulbs to give them another chance. You wonder if you are a failure at orchid growing when a plant in your care declines. The sooner you can shed these feelings of kindheartedness and inadequacy, the sooner you can tailor your collection to include only the most vigorously growing and flowering plants.



Do you really want to run a hospital ward for sick orchids?



Anticipation... waiting for your seedlings to bloom for the first time!

This is the year I decided I wanted a virus free cattleya collection. Little did I know how this would decimate my collection. About a third of the cattleyas with no obvious symptoms of virus tested positive for Cymbidium Mosaic Virus or Odontoglossum Ringspot Virus. With a few exceptions, they were discarded leaving large empty spaces on the greenhouse benches and a very depressed orchid grower. After a month of mourning and an emergency order of bifoliate seedlings from Fred Clarke, I realized I finally had the bench space to move all those seedlings I keep buying into 5 inch pots. It is such a pleasure to walk through the greenhouse and see nothing but vigorously growing plants.

Overcrowding is another problem best avoided. This is not to say that you should stop buying orchids, perish the thought! You can often find new niches that your orchids will just love to inhabit. Once you finally run out of real estate, you may have to eliminate an orchid for each one you bring home. Better that than trying to smush them all together so you don't have enough air movement, not to mention room for their flowers to display properly.



Can you really enjoy orchids sitting on an overcrowded bench? This cattleya had six flower spikes blooming every which way, but there was no pleasure in its presentation.



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The vandas look better than ever this year, look at those roots



Aerides PUNCHINELLO blooming with over 20 flower spikes, grown slightly shadier than most vandas.

Be careful of Greeks bearing gifts, like when you get the phone call from an aging orchidist that their orchids are available free or for a nominal cost. Sometimes the orchidist may not have been able to properly care for his plants for a period of time before you receive the phone call. When I was in the height of my vanda obsession, I got that phone call and many new vandas came home with me. It has taken years for me to cull the diseased plants and those with unexplained poor growth. This year is the first that I can walk through the vanda house and enjoy each and every plant I see. Of course, the pure water from the reverse osmosis system together with proper spacing have contributed mightily to the better growth and flowering.

It is important to learn from your mistakes, to learn what pests and diseases can cause problems so you can do your best to prevent them from recurring. Scale or mealy bug infestations can be treated fairly easily if caught early enough. You may have to repeat the chemical treatment and accept the damage that was caused, but the pests can be eliminated reasonably easily. Damage from virus and many of the fungal pathogens is more insidious. Once the disease enters the plant, it can be carried through the vascular system and be difficult to eradicate, even after cutting away the damaged tissue. Once you become



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comfortable with diagnosing the various ills that may befall your plants, you should be able to administer first aid before the problem negatively impacts the overall health of the plant. Once the plant goes into decline, returning it to health can be a long hard and sometimes unsuccessful battle.

You may think it is hard to throw out that struggling plant. What is really hard is to stroll through your growing area and see disease and poor growth. The pleasure in walking down the aisle and seeing plant after plant with new luscious growth and fattening flower buds is beyond description. Make your growing area your little slice of heaven, specialize in growing only the healthiest and happiest plants. Kick back and smell the orchids!