

**Home and Backyard Orchid Growing**  
Suzanne and Robert Susko, [suzsusko@bellsouth.net](mailto:suzsusko@bellsouth.net)  
November 2015



Suzanne Susko with her monster dendrobium that seems determined to bloom for the next 2 months.

Suzanne and Robert Susko have a unique division of labor, he picks out orchids with an unusual growth habit or beautiful flowers and she figures out how to grow them. Okay, maybe it's not quite that simple, after all Suz picks out some of her own orchids too!

Suz grows her orchids in the pool lanai which adjoins a covered porch attached to the house. The Super Screen covering the lanai screens out about 25% of the incoming light. During the warm growing season the plants grow on rolling racks purchased from Home Depot. The shelving heights are adjustable so the tall dendrobiums and short stuff, such as the bulbophyllums, each have enough room to stretch toward the sun. The racks are retrofit with casters so they can be moved into more or lesser light, more or lesser exposure to rain and ultimately in and out of the portable greenhouse they use from October to March. The FlowerHouse portable greenhouse is plastic and has two windows and two doors so there is ample air flow even on warm days although a fan is run continuously to enhance air movement. An electric heater is used to keep the plants comfortable during really cold weather.



The three adjustable racks can be moved around to the right spot during the warm growing season and then into the FlowerHouse portable greenhouse (shown in the background) for the winter.

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The Suskos solved one of the problems most Florida orchid growers have, water containing high amounts of soluble salts, in a unique way. Their water comes from the Palm Coast utility system although they do have a well for irrigating the yard. They installed a water softener filled with resin rather than salt to soften all the water used in the house. This type of softener is probably more than twice the cost of a traditional water softener, but it is cheaper to operate and you don't introduce toxic sodium into your water supply. They remove any residual chlorine with a charcoal filter and voila, the water is as close to rainwater as you can get without capturing it as it falls from the sky, which they also do. This high purity water gives them a huge advantage in growing all types of orchids, even those salt sensitive cloud forest types that the rest of us just dream about.



Suz grows some of her *Neofinetia falcata* varieties Japanese style, in AAAAA sphagnum mounds in a special Japanese holder made for these beauties.

She likes the looks and the way orchids thrive when grown mounted, including the leafless Jamaican ghost orchid *Dendrophylax funalis* on the right.

Suz has tried quite a few potting mixes and techniques. She uses a bark based medium purchased from OFE (Special Orchid Mix #5) for dendrobiums, cattleyas and similar orchids and sphagnum moss from Green Barn Orchid Supplies for bulbophyllums, catasetums, neofinetias, etc. She grows a lot of orchids on mounts and experiments with growing in baskets, on rafts and in pots. She also has experimented with a variety of fertilizers. Since moving to Florida she has been most successful using Peter's Excel CalMag fertilizer throughout much of the year, but applies a bloom booster to some varieties in the spring and in the fall. She also swears by Biogold Original, a much nicer name than bat poop, which she learned about with her bonsai plants. She applies this organic fertilizer from Japan in a little plastic basket stuck into each pot and just waits for the incredible growth response. She's got other tricks up her sleeves too, and she'll be doing a show and tell session at our January 2016 meeting when several of our members will talk about how they grow orchids in St. Augustine... and Jacksonville... and Palm Coast. Mark your calendars!

It all started for Suz with a SunBulb bag baby cattleya back in 1974, which she grew and flowered in a basement under lights while she and Robert were doing hush hush work in DC and living in the Virginia burbs. They made the move down to Palm Coast in 1997 and never looked back. She has changed her growing area and techniques to accommodate her Florida home and is always fine tuning her approach, learning new ways of doing old things better and trying new kinds of orchids. Her enabler, er I mean husband, helps her find different equipment and growing supplies as well as new types

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of orchids to grow. Suz is a woman of many talents; she is also a potter with her own wheel and kiln. Wonder how long it might be 'til she makes functional and decorative pots and mounts for her... and our orchids?

**Some of Suzanne's Favorite Orchids**



Ctsm. Razzle-Dazzle, Fred Clarke registered this cross at Suz's request after she bloomed the seedling bought from Fred at the Redland Festival



Bulb. saltatorium var. albociliatum, a truly oddball Bulbo with feathery appendages on flower



Myrmecocattleya (Myc.) Luster  
(Cattleya forbesii x Myrmecophila thomsoniana)



Blc. Cherry Suisse 'Jean Gilliland' AM/AOS  
(C. Chocolate Drop x Blc. Oconee)