



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Learn During Repotting

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

The annual repotting marathon is underway. It all starts when many of the slumbering orchids start to wake in the spring and start initiating new growth. New root growth is telling you to get your repotting supplies ready because this is the best time to repot your orchids. Repotting is a traumatic event as your orchid is yanked out of its home, but if it is growing new roots it will get acclimated to its new digs quickly.

Catasetums. Catasetums are the first group of orchids that start to rouse from their winter sleep, the catasetums first and the clowesias last, with all the intergenerics somewhere in between. As early as December, the catasetums are checked weekly looking for the newly emerging green growth to start peeking out at the base of the newest pseudobulbs. They are moved into a staging area for repotting, because there is still another week or two before roots will start growing from the tender new growths. Repot right when the new growth begins, and then keep them dry until the new growth is 5 inches or so tall. You can start watering when the leaves have unfurled and water won't be trapped in the new growth, with the potential to cause crown rot and the death of the new growth.



Uh oh, that catasetum must have some rot inside it that I missed when I potted it up. Those keikis are a sure sign of a survival mechanism.



The freshly potted catasetum was unpotted and there it is, that black rot at the base of the pseudobulb. Mom is a goner.



After cutting through the pseudobulb halfway up, you can see the rot is moving up the vascular tissue. The keikis were removed and potted up.



Plants are hung under the eaves after repotting so they won't be watered until the growths are 5 inches tall and the leaves unfurled.



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Learn During Repotting

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

The last two years I have been struggling with rots in the catasetums. Last year I tried to overcome my rot problems by cutting away the old growths and then drenching the plants with a systemic fungicide several times during the growing season. That apparently was not enough, because there was still a lot of rot discovered this year after the winter rest. I was even more brutal about cutting away all but the newest pseudobulbs and discarding any bulbs with any hint of rot. The catasetums that survived this process were potted up in clay pots with Styrofoam in the bottom third to half of the pot and then long fibered New Zealand sphagnum moss. I always interlayer timed release fertilizer with the moss, but this year I also interlayered a granular Heritage fungicide into the mix. This will be activated once watering begins later this spring and the plant will absorb the systemic fungicide into its tissues and hopefully overcome the problems with rot.

Cattleyas. The cattleyas start rooting about midway through catasetum repotting. I keep a staging bench empty during the repotting season, and inspect each of the benches looking for plants that require repotting this year. The unifoliate is much more tolerant of repotting than the bifoliate, so I am very careful to hold off on repotting bifoliate until I see just the beginning of root growth. If a plant needs to be repotted, it is moved over to the staging bench. Once the staging bench is filled with overgrown cattleyas, the actual repotting begins.



In the evening, potting benches are inspected for plants requiring repotting, which are put on the staging bench for repotting the next day.



Older leaves yellow and give the plant an unhealthy appearance, often these are attached to pseudobulbs deep in the pot.



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Learn During Repotting

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com



The roots grow into and around the Styrofoam, enjoying the airy reservoir. There is no rotting mass of decayed mix in the bottom of the pot.



After repotting, plants are replaced on the benches, with lots of space between pots. Plants look so much better after repotting.

The cattleyas have responded very well to using the shallow slotted pots, lots of chunky Styrofoam in the bottom third of the pot, and the coarse mix of bark, sponge rock, clay pebbles and charcoal. As plants are pulled from their pots, it is clear the roots have grown happily around the Styrofoam and there is no mass of rotted mix in the bottom of the pot. The bark is starting to soften in many of the pots after three years or so, but not enough to cause root damage. Some of the leaves on the oldest pseudobulbs have yellowed and browned giving the plant an unhealthy appearance. As these are unpotted, it is apparent that most of those unhealthy leaves are attached to pseudobulbs deep in the pot and the plant has grown new bulbs over the old, sometimes two layers higher. These older, yellow growths and any leaves with fine dotting indicative of fungal spores are cut away from the plant before situating the remaining growths in the pot. The only other changes being made are replacing Orchidata with Fred Clarke's #5 kiwi bark in the large 8 inch pots. The granular Heritage product is also sprinkled on top of the pot, and then it is top dressed with good cypress mulch to protect emerging roots. It's amazing how much better the plants look after repotting.

It will probably be May before all the cattleyas in the original greenhouse have been given the once over. Many of the bifoliate have been moved over into the whitehouse on shorter benches. It is much easier to monitor for new root growth on these shorter, more narrow benches, and repotting, if necessary, will happen as soon as the new green root tips appear.

Phalaenopsis. The Phalaenopsis are the next major group that will be repotted. The summer bloomers should normally be repotted by February so as not to interrupt their bloom cycle, while the spring bloomers will be mostly repotted in June. None were repotted last year, the prior year they were potted in high quality New Zealand sphagnum moss with varying amounts of Styrofoam depending on the pot size. All the phals were moved into the newly constructed whitehouse last August. After a brief period of letting the Halloween cool



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Learn During Repotting

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

temperatures trigger the flowering process, the furnace was set so the minimum night time temperatures did not drop below 60F. It cost a fair chunk of change in propane, but the phals responded incredibly well to the warm temperatures with multiple spikes of gorgeous flowers.

You learn a lot about what you did right and what you did wrong during the repotting process. This is your opportunity to evaluate the health of the roots in the pot, telling you whether your potting materials are suitable given your watering habits. Keep your eyes and mind open while repotting, so you can tell what went right and what went wrong over the past growing season.