



**St. Augustine Orchid Society**

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

## **Leslie and Her Bulbophyllums**

by Leslie Brickell, [lesliebrickell@gmail.com](mailto:lesliebrickell@gmail.com)

Bulbophyllums were one of the first orchid groups that I purchased in a substantial quantity. Then, Courtney's catts came to stay for a while and Sue's catts on the show table stole my heart, and I went cattleya crazy! But back to bulbos, I love to water and since bulbos love water and heat (my greenhouse can get hot in the summer), they are very hard to kill, and can grow pretty fast. I figured they were a good fit for me as a beginner.



Bulb. gracillimum 'Joy's Dancing Spider' AM/AOS grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

First off, I truly believe that my well water is my best growing friend. I am so grateful for my good water. My bulbos get watered whenever they are approaching dryness. With bulbos, if in doubt, water. Bulbos have small roots so they tend to dry out faster. Salts can build up in dry sphagnum (not a good thing for any plant). Now to offset all the watering, air movement is essential. You do not want the bulbos just sitting in wet sphagnum constantly. There needs to be some gradual change from wet to semi dry. In summer, I usually water them every day to every other day; winter is usually every 2 to 3 days. This really depends on your growing space, air movement, plant size, and potting media used. It has taken me a while to find my niche... I am a slow learner!



Bulb. lilacinum grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

Second, I have a Dosatron and it sure makes feeding a piece of cake. I fertilize every time I water using a very dilute fertilize, equivalent to a rate of about 1/32 tsp/gallon.





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Bulb. mastersianum grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

The best growth I seem to get is from either 6 inch square plastic baskets with a layer of peanuts for drainage and then a small amount of good sphagnum moss or mounted on tree fern plaques. Bill Thoms showed how to use tree fern plaques correctly at one of our meetings. Holding the plaque vertically, if water runs out fast, turn it 90 degrees. The plaque will hold more water and as we know, bulbos really like water. I did start out with wooden baskets and wooden plaques but they rot and then you have to repot and bulbos don't like to be repotted. So the few that I still have on wood will eventually need to be changed out once the wood rots. I am not looking forward to this because the bulbos are fairly large. Of course, this may be an excellent opportunity to share with others!



Bulb. Lovely Elizabeth grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

I do have sachet bags (Linda told me about the sachet bags that can be purchased at the Dollar Store) filled with organics hanging over the bulbos. The organics I use is Mills Magic. I have used this for years with my roses. It is awesome stuff, you should see my geraniums! It can be found at the Rosemania.com website. They ship orders over \$25 for free.

Now, about light and air movement. In the beginning, everything I read seemed to call for shade or low light. Only a couple of sources called for bright light. So, I began with lower light like my phals liked and over the years have moved them around to eventually finding homes in bright light like my catts. My bloom counts and bloom frequency have increased





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greatly with the increased light. I have bulbos hanging in the greenhouse with no other plants shading them and have bulbos getting afternoon sun (in the greenhouse). I think the key is to have lots of air movement. This keeps the leaves cool. I have added a couple of plug in fans to blow on my bulbos 24/7.



Bulb. arfakianum grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

Bulbos are good with high temperatures. They like hot. Those hot summers encourage rapid growth. However, this also means that during winter, bulbos need protection. I keep my heater at 60 degrees on those chilly winter nights.



Bulb. medusae 'Hackneau' grown and flowered by Leslie Brickell.

Finding bulbos locally to purchase can be difficult. You would think that an orchid family that is so large would be available everywhere. Bulbophyllum blooms are not as showy as many other types of orchids so it does make sense that you will need to search for them on line. Every bulbo I own (except 2 that Courtney gave to me) has been purchased on line and shipped to me. That shipping can get expensive! My advice is to take advantage of plants for sale by Bill Thoms when he comes to speak, seek bulbo vendors when you attend large orchid shows (will life ever get back to normal so we can have and attend these wonderful shows?), and make friends with SAOS members who grow bulbos and will share cuttings for free. Bulbos grow fast. That cutting will bloom within a year. And, according to Courtney, bulbos DON'T get virus!