

I Have Bad Culture—A Semi-Cautious Tale

Every month we publish an “Education article” written by Dr. Courtney Hackney, an orchid expert if there ever was one! I read these articles. I also attend almost all meetings and listen attentively to our speakers, sometimes jotting down a few notes. I have a solid collection of orchid books, and read *Orchids* magazine. When I was first getting started with orchids, I regularly attended the AOS Greenhouse Chats online, even occasionally submitting questions of my own. And, I actively seek out solutions to various orchid dilemmas from our own experts—Art, Christina, Lois, Lorraine... AND YET—***I have bad culture!***



Watering—You’re supposed to not let the water from one plant drip into another, right?? Well, the way my plants are set up, that happens pretty often. And, given the way I water, each plant ends up getting a little of the water that was used on the plant before it. There’s just no way around it. I do use either rainwater or water that hasn’t gone through the water softener, though! So, it’s not all bad...

Repotting—I am horribly delinquent in repotting my plants. There are many that need it right now! And, I do scrub out clay pots and reuse them. I know the common wisdom is to either not reuse them or to bake them or some crazy thing, but I just scrub them with a little dish soap and hope for the best.

Sun exposure—This one has always been tricky for me. But way more so now that we’ve moved. In the old place, we had a big screened porch where the screens were most of the height of the walls. In the new spot, there’s a wall to about three feet up, then a screened window, then a window without a screen. The plants on the lower shelves now get almost no sunlight, and the ones on the upper shelf get sunburned! To further complicate things, I got a small greenhouse and moved a bunch of plants down there. OOPS! By the time Christina’s President’s Message warned of shifting sun, many of those orchids suffered a lot of sunburn!



Sterilizing tools—This is probably my worst offense. I do not do this at all. Initially, I would spray my clippers with a fungicide between making any cuts. Now I don’t even bother to do that. Although, in my mind, I keep considering the thing we’ve heard repeatedly recently about just leaving tools to soak in TSP (trisodium phosphate). I’ll get around to finding some at some point...

Bugs—I am quite sure that I have pests on many of my plants. I spray the alcohol/409/water mixture every time I notice any kind of spot. But maybe I don’t have active bugs—I’m never sure whether that bug is just a dead one that I didn’t wipe off! I’m trying to periodically treat them with a cotton ball and wipe them off so I can be sure if it’s new or old. And I do pull them out and spray them down every few months with 3-in-1.

Staking spikes—Nope, don’t do that either. Sorry Lorraine. They’re gonna flower in the direction they want to flower....

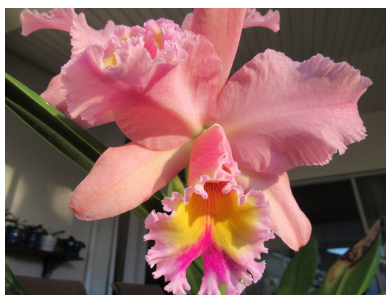
Regardless of all of the things I'm not doing right, I find that I don't kill nearly as many as one would think. I certainly wouldn't advocate for anyone to do things the way I do. I'm sure that if I did things exactly right, I'd have spectacular plants! But you can make mistakes along the way and still reap some rewards.

For example:

- The first orchid I got as a gift in 2016 is still alive, AND a regular bloomer!
- I have been lucky enough to have some really pretty flowers!



P-I--The one that started it all!



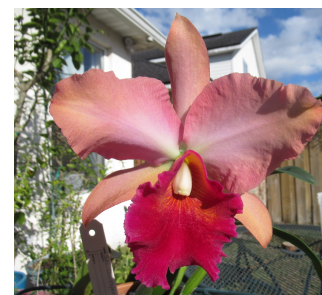
Blc. George King 'Serendipity'



Blc. Hawaiian Deluxe 'NN'



Pot. Lila Ashitomi
'Hawaiian Flare'



Slc. Christopher Hausermann

- Most of the experiments I've done with dividing plants have been successful, leaving me with multiples of various orchids.
- I'm getting ready to see one of my many separated keikis from 7 years ago bloom!



So, don't beat yourself up if you haven't got the right pesticide or fungicide. Or if you don't have the space for a rockin' greenhouse. Or if your light isn't just the right amount to force your plants to bloom. Or if you're still watering by using one ice cube every week. If what you're doing is working for you, and you're seeing results—keep doing it! Maybe tweak it along the way if it feels like your plants will benefit, but don't fret over it. In the words of Dr. Ian Malcolm—Life finds a way!

Jackie Dougherty