

## March 2008 - The Spring Migration of Domesticated Orchids

A monthly growers advice column by Courtney Hackney. [Hackneau@comcast.net](mailto:Hackneau@comcast.net)

Spring has definitely sprung here in Jacksonville, Florida, but it is also happening everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere even if it does not feel like it outside. Officially, spring begins around 22 March, but a change in the sun's intensity is already noticeable. My low-light "Jewel" orchids, sitting in a window that received only indirect sun are beginning to look bleached from the intense light. High light orchids in south facing windows are also beginning to show signs of too much light.

Novice growers may be surprised that orchids normally grown in bright greenhouses can get burned in window sill situations. It is not just the light intensity that burns them, but the sudden increase of light on plant leaves, which have adapted to very low light levels during the long winter. This time of year can be as difficult for indoor orchid hobbyists as it is for those with greenhouses. If there are deciduous trees that shade your house in summer, the situation gets more complicated as new leaves emerge and deep shade appears where there was once intense light flowing into your window sill growing area.

Many indoor growers in the very Deep South, i.e. Florida, have already moved orchids to outdoor growing areas. If you have done this for many years you already know about watching for late cold snaps. Many "migratory hobbyists" (Winter indoors-Summer outdoors) never realize the shock their orchids experience, especially from the change in humidity. This is especially true of hobbyists that have mastered the maintenance of humidity in their indoor growing areas. Winter humidity, even in the South can be much lower than orchids prefer. The addition of more air movement also can lead to much higher water loss. Avoid moving orchids in bud or orchids that will soon be sending up buds outside until they have finished blooming. An orchid plant that has not received enough light to flower during winter is not going to suddenly gain enough energy to bloom this spring season. In fact, it may "decide" not to flower and put out new roots and leaves in response to the sudden change in light and temperature.

Many commercial growers do use this type of "shock" treatment to initiate flowering, but they are shocking plants that have accumulated lots of energy reserves to bloom and are just waiting for the appropriate environmental cues. Clearly, some commercial orchid nurseries were able to fool their orchids into flowering at the correct moment for the World Orchid Congress in Miami in January. Many orchids in

exhibits and in sales booths were flowering early. There were also many tales of commercial growers who failed to get their best clones to flower in time or whose best orchids flowered too early.

Each time there is a major international show there are always aspects that surprise long-time orchidists. The surprise this year was the development and exhibition of multi-flora paphs, which always seemed to be an obvious underdeveloped breeding line. The lack of more cymbidiums during a time when they should have been readily available was also noted. Some commercial growers noted a surprising lack of new lines of phals. With the exception of the new "blue" violacea from Orchidview, there were no big surprises in phals.

There were a number of new products offered orchid hobbyists at the WOC, but most had been available before. I purchased a number of these and will be testing them in the next year and reporting any good results.

One service that was advertised at the WOC is one that would benefit most orchid growers. One company, which formerly produced Peters fertilizers and now makes Jacks fertilizers, has a lab that will test your water and not only tell you what is in it, but what fertilizer to use, and how to use it. The cost may be high for an individual, but inexpensive for orchid clubs that have several members with the same water source. They even provide bottles for shipping water samples. Call 866-522-5752 or email [info@jrpeterslab.com](mailto:info@jrpeterslab.com).

*Jacksonville Orchid Society member Dr. Courtney Hackney, Retired Emeritus Professor of Biology at the University of North Florida, is a noted author and acknowledged "orchid expert." He published a column of orchid advice that ran for many years, and we are presenting select articles with his permission.*

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