Why I Grow The Orchids I Grow

If someone had told me I would develop a passion for orchids many years ago I would have just dismissed it. I've always loved and grown flowers and living most of my life in the north my flowers were mostly annuals, perennials and a few tropicals. Orchids just were not part of anything I knew about.

I moved to South Florida in 2004 and three months later purchased my first orchids. A Dendrobium and Phalaenopsis. I loved the color, bright pink! The flowers were large and beautiful. The vendor said they were easy to grow. A few months later I picked up another pink and another. I kept them in a protected pool screened area and watered them. They bloomed again! My neighbor informed me that to grow orchids you don't have to do anything at all to them. Somehow, I didn't quite believe that. I purchased a few more orchids at and kept them alive and reblooming thanks to a "real orchid vendor" who told me about using 20-20-20 fertilizer which he was also selling. It was different from what you get at your garden centers.

A visit to a small nursery in Hawaii netted 6 more orchid plants and had me thinking about all my new flowers. Most barely stayed alive and did not bloom for me but there was a Grammatophyllum that was still looking good and getting bigger. I drove to the AOS Headquarters located in Delray Beach at the time to visit the "Orchid Doctor" and he helped me understand what I had and what to do with it.

A Christmas present from my husband that year of a monthly orchid delivery encouraged me to learn more. I had mastered Dendrobiums and Phalaenopsis, but Cattleyas were a mystery. Some seemed to bloom only once and the flowers lasted only a very short time while the other types lasted for weeks.

The internet gave me some information about species and I found a forum to better understand about other seemingly crazy named orchids. My husband mentioned that maybe I should check out a local orchid society. I went to a *Boca Raton Orchid Society* meeting, joined that night and volunteered the following week for their show. The morning of the show I arrived and came in the door and was in total awe. I had no idea there were so many colors, shapes and sizes of orchids! I asked a vendor which of his fragrant orchids bloomed more than once a year. He showed me a few he had and I immediately purchased them. I left that day with a bagful and was another step into "Orchid Heaven". I returned the following day and when my volunteer shift was over went back to the same vendor and offered to help, although I was new to orchids and he would need to give me some basic info. I managed to give a little guidance to customers that were looking for the same thing I was. The vendor was happy and I learned much that day by listening to orchid growing tips from the free lectures offered that weekend and what my newfound friend was telling other customers.

I attended every single society meeting and events organized by them and shows in the area. Then came "The *World Orchid Conference*" in Miami. This show had the most beautiful, jaw dropping displays of anything I have ever seen in my life. I was now part of something that so many were already immersed in.

One member who lived nearby invited me to her home and after visiting I knew that I too could really grow orchids! She answered many questions and shared information and experience. Her collection was varied, beautiful and interesting. Her passion was contagious. I was now hooked. My decision was also made that I would attempt to have orchids growing in my garden and have something blooming every day of the year.

An important question now asked of me is "**How do you grow orchids?**" Most of the orchids that I grow naturally grow on trees but are sold in pots. Quite unnatural for them but orchids adapt. But why continue to make them adapt to growing in, around and out of pots? Why not grow them mounted on bark or some type of material so that they can grow in a more natural way? I mounted many of my collection directly on palm trees (before moving to Jacksonville), on cork slabs and tubes, tree fern plaques, slabs or poles, driftwood and even on hanging broken clay pots. Guess what...these plants are happier with the roots reaching out to catch the breezes and growing unconfined. Sure, the care for them is a little different but the reward is great with flower spikes growing more naturally and bending gently with the flowers blooming. I found that I can grow my orchids in areas surrounding my home. Some are terrestrial, growing directly in my garden, some elevated in my gardens and others mounted hanging in nearby trees. A number are still in pots waiting for me to free them. Why do I grow the orchids I grow? I have several answers. I grow them because they make me happy. I grow them because they are a challenge. I grow them because I have learned that they are a very important part of plant life ecology. I grow them so I can share their beauty and make others happy and challenge them to do what I have done. As I was writing this, I went outside to see the keikis from my original dendrobium blooming fifteen years later and still making me happy. I grow orchids because they are a part of our past, present and future. I am in awe of them each time I look at a flower and soak in their sometimes-bizarre beauty. I feel so fortunate to live where I live and can share my love for orchids.

I have come a long way from admiring orchids on a corsage to growing them outside my door. Thank you, my friends, for everything you continue to share with me and our society and letting me see what you see in growing and appreciating them. I continue to learn about the care and culture of these mysterious flowers. I challenge myself to keep my collection as diverse as possible and not let any commit suicide. To answer your question "did I achieve my goal of having orchids blooming every day of the year?" Yes, and there are always more than a few blooming and they are all grown outside. In winter they have an enclosed space for a couple months. I have created my very own little "Orchid Paradise".

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