

February 2011 - Advice and Experience

From Courtney Hackney's Monthly Column of Growing

There are many keys to becoming a great orchid grower but the most important is learning from your mistakes. That does not mean that reading "How To" books is not useful. In fact, they provide a wealth of information easy for a novice to understand, whereas long-time growers tend to go into too much detail for beginners. The problem is that books for the beginner provide a generic approach that experienced growers have then modified as they learned from their mistakes.

The best place to learn from more experienced growers is at your local orchid society. There you will see orchids brought in by different levels of grower who grow under an array of different conditions. Rarely will you find a hobbyist unwilling to share their experience and techniques. The problem is that there are many different ways to grow orchids to perfection and it can be difficult to determine whose advice to follow. But, hobbyists at your local orchid society can provide you with a place to start.

Most of us continue to learn about the orchids we grow and sometimes in ways that we wish would not have occurred. This winter, I arrived home after several days away to find an exhaust vent locked open. The max-min thermometer told me that those cold nights reached into the greenhouse wasting lots of propane and creating temperatures below a healthy minimum for most of the orchids I grow. The cold winter had already produced night temperatures lower than what I try to maintain.

Nothing in the greenhouse froze, but the typical problems of increased bacterial infections and loss of buds occurred within the next week or so. One particularly cold spot in the greenhouse was treated with a weak solution of copper sulfate and individual orchids sprayed with hydrogen peroxide as small spots appeared. At this time it does not look like any orchids, even seedlings, will be lost.

It is hard to avoid frustration when an event such as this occurs. Close examination of my orchids in the following weeks noted a few that looked better than they ever have before. Several phals with origins in the Himalayas have exploded with branched spikes and buds. Usually, they only produce a few buds each year and typically suffer badly during summer. While I have figured out how to nurse them through our hot summers, they have never bloomed this well. Most surprising were other orchids that I did not associate with cooler climates. They also responded similarly and I am hoping to see more blooms from them this spring. Next year, I will treat these orchids

as I do the ones that I know come from colder climates. These are placed outside or in the coldest corners of the greenhouse and monitored with a max-min thermometer.

Cymbidiums are already treated differently from my other orchids, i.e. lots of light and cold in winter and heavy shading in summer. Windowsill growers may not appreciate how much colder some windows are than others and can use this to their advantage if they just attach some thermometers to their windows and note the early A.M. temperatures.

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 here with his permission.

Citation: Hackney, C. (2011, February). February 2011 - Advice and Experience. Retrieved from <http://www.rose4art.com/Growing-tips/Advice%20and%20experience.html>