



The Orchid Collection

Genesee Region Orchid Society

Volume 28, Number 1

September, 2006

www.geneseearchid.org

*Beginners Meeting 6:30 p.m. * Social "Hour" 7:00 - 7:15 p.m. * Meeting begins at 7:15 p.m.*

Senior Adult Lounge at the Jewish Community Center, 1200 Edgewood Avenue, Rochester, NY

NEXT MEETING: SEPT. 11, 2006

Summer is winding down. It's been hot, humid, mild, and now rainy. Although it always seems hard to believe, it's time for new orchid adventures and our first meeting of the Fall season.

Head on down to the JCC as our friend Mario Ferrusi, major domo of Marsh Hollow Orchids in Fenwick, Ontario will be on hand to present, "Masdevallias and Their Culture." Mario will discuss the various species and the hybrids created from them - and how to best care for them all.

Mario is a frequent visitor to the GROS, having been (simultaneously!) an exhibitor, vendor and AOS judge at many of our Spring shows. He's the proprietor of Marsh Hollow Orchids, specializing in the hybridizing of Masdevallias, Odontoglossums, Lycastes and other scattered genera. Mario reports that he now has two greenhouses; the smaller one (15 x 20) is for intermediate to warm plants, and the larger (24 x 32) is reserved for his "cool beauties."

Just recently serving as past president of the Southern Ontario Orchid Society (Ontario's largest orchid group), Mario joined the AOS judging program in 1992 and became accredited in 1998. He is currently Chairman of the Toronto Region.

Mr. Ferrusi will be bringing plants for sale; he doesn't have a web site but if you're interested in a particular orchid, you can call him at (905) 892-4187 or send him an e-mail at mferrusi@sympatico.ca We'll be taking Mario out to dinner at Don Pablo's Mexican Kitchen, 780 Jefferson Road, at 5 p.m. prior to the meeting on September 11th. If you'd like to join us, call Diane Bernard at 315-597-6778. The Show Table, rested and raring to go, will be back - so don't forget your flowering orchids. We'll see you there!

IN THIS ISSUE:

Membership Dues ♡2
"Rules" for Growing ♡3
Orchids!

Masd. (melanoxantha x rex 'Marititan' CHM/AOS)
Grower: Sandi Uhlig
Photo ©2006 Phil Matt



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TIME IS RUNNING OUT!



That's right! If your mailing label on this newsletter says "Dues 2006-2007" to the right of your name, it means that you've forgotten to renew your GROS membership! To avoid being dropped from our mailing list, please pay your dues now. Only paid-up members will receive the October newsletter!

Cut out your mailing label, make any necessary changes, and enclose your check made out to the GROS. Mail to:

Genesee Region Orchid Society
P.O. Box 20606, Rochester, NY 14602
\$20 single membership
\$25 family membership

(Rules, from Page 3)
bloom. If the blossom suffers due to repotting, you still have the plant and it should bloom again in the future.

5.) Try to stick to those orchid genera that most closely match your geographic area or growing conditions.

(I myself find this almost impossible!) Trying to grow *Odontoglossum crispum* in south Texas or Florida is a waste of bench space. Similarly, growing most *Vandas* in northern New England is not very rewarding. Frequently, you can keep the orchid alive. Orchids are very adaptable, but if you coach a flower it is usually disappointing. My greenhouse is cool-intermediate. I still have ten *phalaenopsis*, which from time to time bloom, seldom with more than a few blossoms. Compared to the display put on by the same plants grown in southern California or Florida - no contest. My problem is that they are favorites and I can't bear to part with them. I realize that with the right controls, heating

systems, supplemental HID lighting, evaporative cooling, misting systems and a very fat wallet, you can grow anything, anywhere. But for those of us whose last name isn't Gates, matching the genera to your conditions is usually worthwhile.

-Courtesy of the New Hampshire
Orchid Society newsletter, October 2000.
Edited for the GROS

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Some Rules for Growing Orchids You Won't Find in a Book

1.) Never believe anything that anyone tells you about growing orchids.

Use it as a guide, but don't take it as gospel. What could be very good advice is usually based on years of observation by a competent grower under specific conditions and therefore may not be transferrable. It is totally impossible to duplicate the conditions of light, humidity, air movement, water quality, and other variables, that allowed one grower to turn out superb orchids time after time. Those variables are impossible to duplicate across town let alone across country. What works at one greenhouse in Malibu will probably not work on a windowsill in Rochester. Indeed, what works on the east side of a street in Brighton may not work on the west side of the same street! Why? Because of those impossible-to-duplicate variables.

Let's say, for argument's sake, you try. An expert grower explains to you the temperature variation, humidity, fertilizer rates, degree of shade, etc. he uses in his greenhouse. You try to match it. Problem number one: you can't trust the instruments you are using to measure these basic parameters. For example, I tested a variety of thermometers (digital, analog, recording, etc.) to determine their accuracy. Starting with a mercury lab thermometer whose accuracy I verified, I compared its readings to those obtained on a variety of other thermometers. Results? +5° to -6°, or an 11° span - that's the difference between growing warm and cool!

For a second example, I compared a number of humidity meters in a greenhouse where relative humidity had been determined to be 68% using a wet/dry bulb hygrometer. Results were -30 to +22%, or a 52% span.

Third example. Our local society tested samples of water brought in by members for total dissolved solids with a commonly used TDS meter. The results varied from 0 PPM (rain water) to 690 PPM. Most samples were between 110-150 PPM and came from municipal water supplies. How good is your water or that of the advice giver? (For comparison, 1/4

teaspoon of 20-20-20 balanced fertilizer dissolved in one gallon of distilled water gave a reading of 180 PPM. In addition, another TDS meter from a different manufacturer consistently gave readings 10% lower. When you add in the differences in available light, size of plants, type of pots, degree of air movement, etc., the conclusion I have reached is that growing orchids is much more art than science.

2.) Even if you duplicate all of the conditions of a championship grower you will not get the same results.

One cannot discount the human factor - what are the personal prejudices of the specific grower? I, for example, follow the basic rule, "When in doubt, water." It took several years and more than a few orchids for me to modify my growing techniques to take into account that I was basically drowning some of my plants. My solution was not to change my prejudices (a waste of time) but to switch to a less water retentive potting mix and clay pots. I have a friend with the opposite problem whose orchids benefitted greatly by doing the exact opposite. Learn what works for you! If this is different from your friend with 9 FCC's and a dozen CCM's, try working his methods into your situation. Experiment!

Please note that I am not saying that advice should not be sought, especially from experienced successful orchid growers - just that what works for them might not work for you. Don't switch your entire collection to clay pots with a 50/50 mix of shredded banana leaves and cat's eye marbles because an "expert" grows that way. Try it on a few orchids; it seldom hurts to experiment on just a few plants.

3.) Orchids will grow in just about anything, even dirt (provided it's the right orchid ...)

A look into a popular orchid supply catalog yields the following list of materials with which to pot orchids: Fir bark (3 sizes); redwood chips, redwood wool, osmunda fiber, coconut fiber, coconut peat, sugar cane bagasse (I have no idea what this might be); Aliflor (3 sizes); pumice rock (3 sizes); New Zealand sphagnum moss (4 sizes); amazon moss; New Zealand tree fern mulch; Florida sphagnum moss; Wisconsin sphagnum moss; Canadian peat moss (3 sizes); Pro-Mix; sheet moss; perlite (3 sizes); Solite; lava rock (2 sizes); vermiculite; Aerolite; Styrofoam peanuts; charcoal (4 sizes); rockwool (5 for-

mulations); cork nuggets; cork slabs; tree fern totems (8 sizes.) In addition to the above, 12 premixed combinations of these ingredients are also available. This is from an older catalog. I'm sure that there are even more choices available today, including pellets made from recycled automobile tires and chopped up foam carpet pads. Why all the choices?

Obviously, all of these work for some people, but will they work for you? Some growers swear by NZ sphagnum or rockwool - others positively loath the stuff. Find out what works best for you in your conditions. Again, Experiment!

4.) Always, ALWAYS repot new orchids.

You don't need the grief of importing all manner of nasty critters into your growing area. Getting rid of slugs or bush snails after they have infested a collection is tough. Waking up one morning to find the just-opened bud of a prized orchid with a hunk chewed out of it by a slug is more than a little annoying. I recently found 6 bush snails in one pot of a newly acquired orchid from a well respected grower. Repotting also allows for inspecting the roots of the orchid and generally assessing the condition of the plant. Orchids frequently have the unfortunate habit of trying to bloom when severely stressed. It is not uncommon to find an orchid in bud or flower with no viable roots (beware of orchid clips.)

Lastly, repotting allows you to get your orchids in *your* pots growing in *your* potting mix. As evidenced by #3 above, orchids arrive in their new home in a wide variety of potting mixes, all of which have different drying rates and some of which may have begun to break down. Proper watering is much simpler when the mix is uniform throughout your collection.

4a.) Generally accepted rule of orchid culture: "Never repot an orchid in spike or bloom."

One would surmise that this is the exception to rule #45 above. NOT!! Always means ALWAYS! I have repotted many different genera of orchids in spike or bloom at all times of the year with no noticeable effect. Maybe I'm lucky, but in the case of a rootless orchid in bud, immediate remedial action has more than once saved an orchid that would have died, had I waited until blooming was finished. Besides, I am buying the plant, not the

(continued on Page 2)

The *Orchid Collection* is a publication of the Genesee Region Orchid Society. It is published ten times per year for our members. Single membership is \$20.00, family membership is \$25.00 annually. Dues should be sent to the GROS at P.O. Box 20606, Rochester, N.Y. 14602

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The Genesee Region Orchid Society (GROS) meets every month from September through May at the Jewish Community Center, 1200 Edgewood Avenue, Rochester, NY, on the first Monday following the first Sunday of each month. (Dates sometimes vary due to holidays, etc.) The GROS is an Affiliate of The American Orchid Society and of The Orchid Digest Corporation. Material in our newsletter, *The Orchid Collection*, may be freely reprinted in other orchid society publications with proper attribution. Copyrighted illustrations, photographs or articles may not be reprinted without the express written permission of the artist or author.



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SEE PAGE 2 INSIDE