



The Orchid Collection

Vol. 33, No. 4 - December, 2011

Genesee Region Orchid Society, Inc.
<http://www.geneseeorchid.org>

NEXT MEETING: DECEMBER 5, 2011

“Orchids 101” 6:00 p.m. ❁ Social “Hour” 7:00 - 7:15 p.m. ❁ Meeting begins at 7:15 p.m.

Senior Lounge, Jewish Community Center, 1200 Edgewood Ave., Rochester, NY



Paph. villosum, species orchid grown by Joe Kunisch of Bloomfield Orchids, GROS Spring Show 2011. Photo ©Phil Matt.

The Auction last month saw more than 100 orchids find new owners. A much-larger-than-usual crowd of both members and those new to the GROS spent an enjoyable evening of enthusiastic grazing and bidding. See inside on Page 2 for the particulars.

December brings some sort of change in the “weather,” along with the holiday season. If Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday and Green Tuesday haven’t completely obliterated your urge to leave the house, be sure to join us as Glen Decker, proprietor of Piping Rock Orchids in Galway, NY presents “How to Grow Great Slipper Orchids.” It promises to be a great evening, and you won’t even have to fight your way in!

A frequent exhibitor and vendor at our Spring shows, Glen has spoken at the GROS in past seasons, bringing us tales of his adventures in South America in pursuit of the once-elusive *Phrag. kovachii*. His nursery, [Piping Rock Orchids](http://www.pipingrockorchids.com), is one of the few places in the US where orchidists can legally obtain *Phrag. kovachii* - as well as many of its hybrids. Since Glen will be bringing plants with him to sell at the meeting, be sure to contact him in advance if there’s something in his extensive orchid stock that you would like. At the time of this newsletter’s publication, we do not have any further details - contact Glen for pre-ordering details.

All members please note: since our speaker will be selling at the meeting, there will be no plant sales by members for the December meeting.

The Show Table will be back, so don’t forget your flowering plants. We’ll see you there!

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GROS Auction Again Proves Successful

This years GROS auction was a success. Although preparations started off slowly, with no chair persons until two months before the auction, the work of a large number of people turned the situation around. Even a last minute change of venue, to the JCC's North hallway, seemed to help rather than hinder our efforts.

Financially, we exceeded our goals. We had 55 bidders, which is the largest number in recent memory. We also delivered a lot of plants to people who enjoy growing them! With several bidders coming from outside of the club, we were able to promote ourselves to potential new members.

The co-chairs, **Cheri Dills**, **Anthony Gerardi** and **Jeff Snyder**, would like to thank everyone who contributed to the auction. **Diane Bernard**, **Dwaine Levy**, and **John Shepard** donated plants. **Natalie Auburn** and **Sue Flanders** organized the food tables. **Janet Glocker** and **Dave Weiss** stored plants at their houses. Diane Bernard, Sue Flanders, **Mark Gillette**, Janet Glocker, **Helene Novick**, and Dave Weiss set up the auction tables. **Ron Uhlig** and **Josh Vince** ran check in, bidder tracking, and check out. **Sandi Uhlig** helped relay information to Ron and Josh. **Fran Murphy**, **Bill Renick**, and **Tom Vince** helped wrangle plants during the auction. Anthony Gerardi put together a beautiful slide show, which was very helpful considering that only a small minority of the plants were in bloom. Finally, Dave Weiss had the idea and took the initiative to advertise our auction in the *Democrat and Chronicle*. This was a key factor in getting interest from outside of the club and increasing the number of bidders from our usual 35 - 40. Whether or not your name appears here, your efforts were appreciated!

Finally, we would like to thank all those who attended and bid on plants. You are the ones who truly made this year's auction a success.

-Jeff Snyder



Today's Moss Culture: Tips and Techniques for Its Changing Face

With the bulk of *Phalaenopsis* being sold these days being potted in New Zealand sphagnum moss, which is packed in like a brick, it's more important than ever to adjust many of our old cultural practices. Often the plant is in a clear lightweight grow pot, much like a liner. Unfortunately, many growers have experienced root and eventual plant loss due to either over-or underwatering as a result of this new cultural challenge of growing in such a densely packed medium.

For answers to my questions about adjusting our cultural practices for these plants, I went to Norman Nang, of Norman's Orchids and www.orchids.com, with orchid nurseries in both the United States and Taiwan. In addition to his 24-plus years of experience in growing *Phalaenopsis* in moss, Fang has an extensive background in horticultural science, having received his bachelor of science in ornamental horticulture from California State Polytechnic University.

Watering and Fertilizing - People often make the mistake of watering both bark- and moss-potted plants at the same time. Fang's first suggestion is to separate the moss-grown plants from those in bark or other media because plants in moss will retain moisture longer. As a result of placing the moss-grown plants in a separate location, you can avoid inadvertently overwatering them by splashing or dripping when watering the remainder of your collection. It's also a good idea to grow moss-potted seedlings in an area separate from mature plants.

Plants in transparent pots filled with New Zealand moss will show a distinct line of green moss in the upper half of the container, with the moss in the lower half retaining its natural color. This is an indication that the moss dries from the bottom up, the exact reverse of bark's drying properties.

Complete all watering early in the day, according to the current day-night temperatures. The plants will benefit from their pots being placed on a tilt so water can't collect in the crown, which will help avoid bacterial rot. For the most efficient watering, don't allow the plants

to become more than 50 percent dry; this is most easily observed when they're growing in transparent pots. Then, instead of watering by soaking the pots from the bottom, handwater from the top with a small water breaker such as the red Dramm water breaker.

Double watering usually works best for plants grown in moss. Water until the water backs up to the rim of the pot, let it soak in and then water again until it drains out the bottom hole. Growing your plants in open shuttle trays will more readily allow the medium to dry from the bottom up, in addition to helping with better plant spacing. When the moss dries from the bottom up, there is less risk of rotting the roots at the bottom of the pot.

Do not fertilize a plant that has become too dry between waterings. Instead, water it thoroughly so the moss is remoistened and then fertilize on the following day. Because moss doesn't leach, due to its need for less-frequent watering, a dry plant will soak up more fertilizer than is needed, thus causing fertilizer burn on the leaves and roots.

"It's always a good idea to wear rubber gloves when working with New Zealand moss."

A good rule of thumb to apply to a fertilizer regimen is this: if there's no light, don't water and don't fertilize. For plants growing in moss, there is no need to fertilize every week, with the frequency of watering depending on the climate. In the autumn and winter, apply a balanced fertilizer containing all the essential micronutrients at a dilute strength every other watering, and only on sunny days. From spring through the summer, it can be applied at one-half to full strength once a month. Alternatively, if the medium is still moist, foliar feeding is an option.

During these warmer and brighter months, the plants will dry out more quickly and watering frequency will need to be increased. In addition, watering with a Physan 20™ solution once a month at the rate of 1 teaspoon per gallon of water (5 ml per 3.8 l) will help prevent bacterial and fungal problems. Never use slow-release fertilizers on plants grown

in moss because the release of the elements is affected by temperature or moisture, causing either over- or underfertilizing problems.

An especially useful tip from Fang will help avoid problems associated with *Pythium*, a natural fungus that can grow in pipes. He suggests allowing your water to run first to rid the pipes of this potential problem. If you have hard water, it's imperative to make sure the moss is halfway dry before watering to avoid buildup of mineral salts in the medium.

Potting - There are several qualities of New Zealand sphagnum moss available, and the moss is produced in Chile, New Zealand and Yunnan, China. Fang prefers the New Zealand long-fiber moss, which has a pH of 4.0-4.5; *Pythium* and fungi don't tend to grow under such a low pH. For a small collection, he suggests purchasing and using fresh moss in smaller rather than larger bales. Better quality moss will remain good for up to 24 months and with the addition of charcoal or bamboo charcoal it can last up to three years.

Pretreat only the amount of moss you intend to use rightaway. It can either be steam-sterilized, which will kill all weed pathogens, or soaked overnight, which is more easily achieved by the average grower.

It's always a good idea to wear rubber gloves when working with New Zealand moss. Soak the moss overnight with 1 teaspoon of Physan 20™ per gallon of water (5 ml per 3.8 l). Soaking will break the surface tension of the moss and the Physan 20™ is biodegradable. Squeeze the moss out by hand and then fluff it to expand the fibers. Alternatively, if you don't want to squeeze the moss, it can be dried in the sun. When potting, the resulting moss should be damp, not wet.

At several nurseries in Taiwan the plants are usually shifted from their

current pot to one that is only ½-1 inch (1.25-2.5 cm) larger. Pack a small amount of fresh moss into the bottom of the new container. Remove the plant from its old pot, leaving that moss ball intact if the moss is still viable. Then

wrap fresh moss around the root ball, and firmly push it into the new pot so the top of the root ball is 1 inch (2.5 cm) below the pot rim. Soften any rigid aerial roots by watering them first before tucking them into the new pot.

It's important to leave no air spaces in the root area, so don't be afraid to pack the moss tight. Although we may think that plants with their roots packed this tight would receive no aeration, this theory has been scientifically proven



Photo ©Phil Matt

Taiwanese *Phalaenopsis* hybrid growing in New Zealand sphagnum moss: (Phal. Golden Peoker × Brother New Player) × Phal. Snow Leopard

to be incorrect. Even when tight, the moss has plenty of air space.

Root pruning — if necessary to fit the plant into its new container — can be healthy. Fang suggests using a rooting hormone (basal) solution, such as Dip 'n Grow™, at the recommended rate. After potting a root-pruned plant, withhold regular watering, withhold fertilizer and reduce the light for the first month. Allow for good air movement and don't crowd the plants, and soon new roots will break through.

Clear or transparent pots are preferred for several reasons. They allow you to see the condition of the root system and help determine the moisture content of the moss.

Because roots also photosynthesize, clear pots allow this to occur, causing new roots to grow down into the pot in search of moisture rather than remaining aerial as often occurs with plants growing in opaque plastic pots filled

with bark mixes. If you feel the moss isn't drying out enough under your conditions, add about 30 percent charcoal or bamboo charcoal to the moss to aid the drying process. However, once the plant has reached a 6-inch (15-cm) pot size, discontinue the use of moss and change to another medium to avoid potential root rot. Fang points out that you'll achieve better growth and flowering from your plants if they are grown in moss and, in the long run, it's actually less expensive to use due to its longevity before needing to be replaced.

For those who want to get their moss-grown plants established in a different medium, the shift in growing medium involves the plants undergoing a transition from a constantly even moisture supply to one that can often be erratic. Again, a little extra care when repotting will help the plant

make this transition easier. The first thing to look for on the plant is new roots bearing bright apple green tips, showing that the plant is going into active vegetative growth.

Remove all the moss from the root system and spray it with a solution of 1 teaspoon of Physan 20™ to a gallon of water (5 ml to 3.8 l). After repotting in the new medium, place the plant in lower light in a separate area and withhold heavy watering. Mist the plant more often or raise the humidity in this area to help avoid the loss of its older leaves. Once new roots begin to break out, the plant can slowly be returned to higher light and normal watering can be resumed. Again, the addition of charcoal can aid in the moisture-retention properties of the new medium. If a fuzzy fungus, which can impede the plant's ability to take up water and fertilizer, is observed growing on the roots, follow the practice of applying a water-Physan 20™ solution once a month.

Temperature, Light and Humidity - Plants growing in New Zealand moss benefit from several cultural advantages in addition to the moss's ability to provide an even supply of moisture. Plants that have just been deflasked

“The biggest danger with moss is the overwatering that people do without realizing the amount of moisture the pots still retain...”

are kept at 70–80°F (21–27°C) nights and 80–85° days (27–29°C). For the vegetative growth stage, plants are kept at 65–68°F nights (18–20°C) and 80–85°F (27–29°C) days. For flowering induction and finishing, the plants are kept at 60–62°F (16–17°C) nights and 78–80°F (26–27°C) days. For those growing under lower humidity conditions, *Phalaenopsis* in moss retain a higher humidity level around the leaf canopy. In addition, since the moss provides more moisture around the roots and leaves, *Phalaenopsis* can be grown in much higher light (up to 3,000 foot-candles) for optimum growth without fear of burning the leaves. The plants have no particular need for warmer nights or cooler days as they will readily adjust to whatever the temperatures are.

Thanks to this new moss-grown generation of *Phalaenopsis*, growers can achieve the maximum growth and most abundant flowering from their plants, having made proper adjustments to their watering and fertilizing practices.

Special Note from the Author:

You should be aware that in interviewing Norman about watering plants in moss, he was making his comments as would relate to growing in California or Taiwan where the weather is wonderful & the plants dry out evenly, from the bottom & the top.

In the Northeast, I've found the same plants dry from the top down - with the bottom of the pot remaining damp for weeks, even when they're in open trays. Therefore, I suggest to people that they water when the moss is dry to about 1" down - but only add water until it backs up to the rim of the pot...the mix knows when it's taken in enough water to rewet the dry 1" and will come right back to the rim.

Watering all the way through the pot at every watering will oversaturate the moss at the bottom, resulting in root loss. About once every month - most often it's more like every 2 months - I can water the pots all the way through since they've dried out enough right down to the bottom. The biggest danger with moss is the overwatering that people do without realizing the amount of moisture the pots still retain - in other words, do not water as you would with plants in a bark mix, by wa-

tering until the water comes out the bottom. Check out my culture notes in the Notes link on my Facebook page (www.facebook.com/orchidphile) where I discuss this thoroughly.

- Carri Raven-Riemann
the orchidPhile
orchidphile@optimum.net

Carri Raven-Riemann is an AOS accredited judge, former president of the International Phalaenopsis Alliance, owner of the orchid-Phile (specializing in multifloral, miniature and novelty *Phalaenopsis*), and a member of the AOS Membership Committee.

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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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Genesee Region Orchid Society Officers 2011-2012

President	Bill Renick	621-4983	pres10q@geneseeorchid.org
Executive VP	David Weiss	544-3561	veep@geneseeorchid.org
Treasurer	Josh Vince	210-0124	trease@geneseeorchid.org
Program VP	Carol Butcher		2prog@geneseeorchid.org
Secretary	Natalie Auburn	359-4852	sec@geneseeorchid.org
Member-at-Large	Mollie Weimer	218-9526	matlarge@geneseeorchid.org

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AOS Rep.	Dave Weiss	544-3561	aosrep@geneseeorchid.org
Auction	Jeff Snyder	377-5895	auct10@geneseeorchid.org
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Librarian	Mariko Pollock	442-6527	libr@geneseeorchid.org
Monroe Cty. Liaison	David Hayes	782-0112	monroe2@geneseeorchid.org
Newsletter	Phil Matt	288-7025	webnews@geneseeorchid.org
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