



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Deflasking

February 2001

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[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Every January the mail brings beautiful seed catalogs to help us get through the winter. The Orchidist's equivalent is buying community pots or flasks. Many books caution the amateur from taking this step until one attains more growing experience. While there are many pitfalls awaiting the amateur, the thrill of watching plants you raised from "babies" is well worth the effort.

There are also steps you can take that maximize your potential for success. For many years my success with flasks was low because I did not recognize the special care that infant plants require. My criteria for success were also unrealistic as I counted the loss of each small plant as a failure. There are several keys that will ensure success for even amateurs. Be sure you start with inexpensive hybrids that are easiest to grow in your conditions. Try expensive hybrids and species only after you have mastered the techniques required to get plants from seedlings to bloom.

Flasks are often judged the most difficult, but provide the most plants for the buck. Plants actively growing in flasks when purchased make the transition to pots more easily than those that have stopped growing. Seedlings stop growing in flasks when they use all the sugar in the gellike media in which they are planted. Do not get a flask if the media is almost gone or if there are few roots in the media.

Remove plants from the flask when they begin to slow growth or begin to fill the space in the flask. It is better to buy a flask with fewer large plants than one with lots of small ones. To transplant from a flask to community pots loosen by filling the flask with warm water. Gently agitate until seedlings begin to separate from the media. A Chop Stick can help the process.

The transition from flask to pot is where expert and amateur alike lose most plants. To limit loss dissolve one tablespoon of sugar in a quart of rainwater or distilled water. Heat the sugar water mix in a microwave to a temperature adequate for a baby bottle. Soak seedlings in this mixture for 15 minutes, no longer. Each seedling will appear plump when you take them out. Spread seedlings out on a paper towel to dry. Do not add hormones like Superthrive, fertilizer, bactericides or fungicides to the water. Seedlings are already sterile and these products tend to desiccate seedlings. Seedlings survive best if placed into community pots even if they are large enough for small pots. They take up less space and seem to like each other's company. You can use either clay or plastic pots, whatever you use for Orchids. Add proper drainage and fill pot with a fine potting mix appropriate for the type of Orchid. ProMix for Phals works well for me as does fine bark. Be sure and leave the surface of the media 1.5-2 inches from the top of the pot. This maintains a microclimate of higher humidity around seedlings. How many plants do you put into each community pot? Best results occur when there are enough plants to fill the entire space of the pot when viewed from above. Roots of each plant should be in contact with the media.

Highest survival rates occur when more plants are together. You can separate them later after they have adapted to life outside the bottle.



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Do not place new community pots in high light. For the first 3-4 days place under a bench or between densely growing plants under lights. Also do not put in an area that is getting high air movement that can dry them out quickly. If you cover them with plastic there is the risk of bacterial infection and they will not get adapted to life outside the bottle. During these first few days plants will be shifting from getting their food from their roots via the media to photosynthesis. The sugar solution you gave them gets them through the transition. Seedlings need to be kept moister than their adult counterpart and you will likely lose a few. Once you get the hang of it you will have fun seeing how different siblings can be and sharing your extra plants with friends. A prominent California Phalaenopsis grower stated that he considered getting 30% of seedlings removed from flask to blooming size a success. Use that as your definition of success and give it a try. P.S. Deflasking techniques were borrowed from H.P. Norton at Orchidview