



## St. Augustine Orchid Society

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

### Culling Your Orchids

November 2002

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[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Real cold arrives this month requiring those that grow outside all summer to take some permanent action. Windows, enclosed porches, and every possible location suitable are filled with orchids of all kinds. If you grow under lights, you too were likely tempted to put a few of your larger plants outside under the trees. Lest those growing inside feel lonely, many of us with greenhouses also succumbed to the temptation to let the orchids "run free" all summer. The coming months will be trying for both orchid and orchid grower as we attempt to find space.

Now is the time to make some hard decisions about the orchids you want to enjoy next year. If you were lucky, your orchids have grown and perhaps multiplied since going outside. The problem is that there is not enough space for them all. Most of us also found it necessary to add a few new plants to the collection making a bad situation worse. There are few hobbyists that do not have a space problem this time of year in the Carolinas. Failure to take a few simple steps now will result in problems next spring that may take a whole year to solve.

Go through each orchid and decide whether it was worth the effort having it in your collection. Did it flower last year? Were you happy with the flower quality, color, size, etc. If the plant was mature then you should be getting the best of what the plant has to offer. You may have to wait a few years to see the potential in a seedling as first flowers may be less than their full potential. Is there an orchid that has never grown well for you? Or one that always seems to be in the midst of a scale outbreak? Once your collection has filled your available space, you may find growing orchids much more enjoyable if these plants go in the garbage. This is especially true for those that are diseased or badly damaged by insects.

There are also orchids that, because of their parentage, are not suited to your growing conditions. One famous Cattleya parent, Blc Fortune, has produced some of the most beautiful hybrids ever made, such as Blc Goldenzelle. In general, hybrids made with Blc Fortune or even hybrids with this hybrid as a grandparent do poorly under my growing conditions. These, I reluctantly discard. Some paphs also seem to have continuous problems with bacterial rot, which is treatable, but is tiring. These have been discarded and replaced by similar hybrids that are not as susceptible to rot.

Hopefully, repotting has yielded divisions of your favorite plants. Keep one for yourself and give, trade, or sell the others. If something happens to your plant there is a good chance it will be around and you can get a division back. A friend of mine in California lets her large Cattleyas grow out of the pot and cuts off the lead 4 or 5 bulbs. She fastens them in a pot with some crock in the bottom and gradually adds media through the summer. If the new division is doing well at the end of the summer she puts the mother plant on the raffle table. Her orchids are magnificent because she discards those that do not grow rapidly enough to grow out of the pot within the 2-3 year life span of her media. Perhaps without realizing it, she has also selected for plants that do well under her growing conditions.

During the past two years I attempted to eliminate orchids infected by virus and at the same time make space in my greenhouse. It was a great plan. The surprise has been that orchids that grow poorly are not always infected with one of the viruses that can be detected,



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while some that grow like weeds are infected. Contrary to popular opinion and many books, orchids can be infected by viruses and continue to grow and flower well. Imagine, however, how well they might grow without virus. Virused plant should be discarded unless they are special old clones. These I hold until I find a virus free division. Orchids that have tested virus-free, but grow poorly may simply be infected by one of the many viruses for which there are no tests so discard them if they grow poorly and save yourself the cost of the test.

Most hobbyists are aware that viruses have been detected in cattleyas, cymbidiums, and odontoglossoms. Other genera probably carry viruses too. Many older phal clones obtained as stem props exhibit the same slow growth problems as other orchids with viruses. While there may be other causes, they should be treated as any other under-performing orchid if they meet the criteria above. Having a few special orchids in a collection that require extra care is OK, as long as most are relatively trouble free. Space and time are two of your most important assets so avoid wasting both and discard orchids that you do not like, those that do not grow or flower well, and those that continually become diseased.