



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Collecting Orchids

August 2012

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

Few orchid hobbyists are able to contain themselves when it comes to purchasing new orchids. The fever gets even worse for us "old timers" who really get into one group of orchids or another. Typically, the windowsill fills, then a light table is purchased, which quickly fills, then an outdoor growing area of some kind is built, but ultimately there is a limit for all of us.

While new hobbyists ask about diseases, growers who have followed the progression above ask how one limits the obsession. Remember there are an unlimited number of orchids out there to be purchased. Some years ago, I developed a list of classic cattleyas clones that I would like to have and save for posterity. For the most part, I have found those clones and enjoy them for what they represent when they bloom because many are not as nice as their modern counterparts. It is fun to examine their immediate progeny, especially those that produced awards, and to understand exactly how the clone in question was able to produce such memorable offspring.



Lc. Allen Condo 'Hackneau'

The difficulty of finding these special clones has made keeping them more important to me than a modern clone that can quickly be found on the internet. I avoid repotting these clones because there is always a risk of infection and disease during repotting.



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Instead, I wait until there is a 3 or 4 bulb division growing outside the pot that I can take without disturbing the mother plant. Once I get a division, I wait a year or so to be sure the division is thriving before disturbing the mother plant. Often there were other divisions in the pot or there will be additional growths from back bulbs. In a few cases, there were three or four divisions in the original pot. Repotting now means that I have an already established division from the year before and several divisions to trade or sell. Repotting these special clones happens only once every 6-10 years and I try to always have at least two divisions just in case something bad happens. For years, I have traded with other like-minded experienced hobbyists just in case there is a disaster in my greenhouse. In my mind, I am not the owner of these great old orchids, just a caretaker who will eventually pass them on to another caretaker.

There are also many species in my collection and I am constantly buying seedlings of these species, searching for even better or newer forms. Rarely do I find one that is superior to what I have, but it is interesting just to see the kinds of variation that exist with any species. There are also seedlings from other growers that are bloomed out just to see what those parents pass along. Even when they are very beautiful, I rarely keep such seedlings because of space.



Bc. Teresa's Smile

My own crosses are treated differently. If it is a hybrid that I expect to be very uniform, there may be only 10-15 bloomed out. I keep a few that represent the best of the grex. Larger numbers of other hybrids that are expected to produce a variety of colors and shapes are flowered just to understand how the various genes are resorted. This can take considerable space, but giving a few seedlings to friends allows me to see more variation. I regularly get emails with photos from friends who have flowered one of my crosses, which is always a treat.