

# New Year's Resolutions for Orchid Growers



For scientific reasons, all plants have names which distinguish their genus and species. Frequently, individual plants are given a third name. Because orchids are among the most prized of flowering plants, growers keep track of these names for each plant. Thus, every orchid is identified by three names: the first gives the big group or genus (e.g., *Cattleya* or *Phalaenopsis*) to which it belongs and sets some of the boundaries for potential hybridizing. The correct name is determined by international authorities who publish the correct (and current) names which can be found on the web. This name is often abbreviated.

The second (in nature, species) name gives its relation to genetically close relatives – sort of like a name for all of the blood relatives from mating of close relatives with the same family names. Just as with the genus level name, these species' names are determined by international authorities and are published and can be found on the web. Because the genus and species level names are important in scientific pursuits, these names are monitored closely and revised when appropriate (making life more challenging for the hobbyists and AOS judges but keeping the system coherent).

Nature does not recognize rules about incest and orchid hybridizers often deliberately mate closely related plants to isolate wanted traits. Mating of species produces remarkably uniform children. Sometimes one of these children has a different trait which is prized. This prized plant can be given a third (or clonal) name. The third name identifies a particular, genetically unique, plant. This third one is like a given name, and is often a name chosen

by the owner of that individual plant. Hybridizers are especially careful with these names so that close-inbreeding can be tracked. Hobbyists are interested in these given names because they are necessary for establishing which actual plants are better and, thus, worthy of award recognition. If you ever want to enter a plant into a show, you will need to know this third name. If it already has one, you will be able to recognize it because it will be surrounded by single quotation marks on its label. American Orchid Society Quality Awards are given to particular plants, identified by this third name. Once given to a particularly plant, this third name is permanently attached to the plant as are the Quality Awards. When a plant is awarded, the owner has the right to add that award to the label. You can tell that a plant has been awarded when you buy it, if it has the award written on it. The award will follow the clonal name (in single quotes) and have a slash mark followed by an abbreviation of the awarding organization. For instance, AM/AOS means that the orchid received an Award of Merit from the American Orchid Society.

Fortunately, the names attached to orchid hybrids closely parallel those for natural species. The names get longer, more complex at times, but also more memorable. Because hobbyists are less constrained in the names they can give their individual plants, the names in single quotes are usually the funniest, bawdiest, or even most touching. Part of the fun of orchids is getting your plant awarded and having the name you have given your plant published in the official record of awards kept by the American Orchid Society. Hobbyists often honor friends or family with these names. If you do give your plant a name, it is up to you to keep track of it.



So, safeguard your plants identity by just shoving its label down into the pot or using one that ties on. Alas, orchid labels have a way of wandering off. Beginning with your first orchid, make a special effort to keep the label. Conscientious vendors try to provide each plant with a label with these three items (and sometimes more). At first, these labels may not mean much to you the buyer; many of the names are Latin or Greek derived and some of the information is abbreviated. But, as your experience grows, these labels will become more and more valuable to you. So, keep them with the plant.

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