



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Five Cattleya Tips from Quest Orchids

by Sue Bottom, based on information from Yolanda and Segundo Cuesta of Quest Orchids

Segundo and Yolanda Cuesta came up to St. Augustine from Miami the night before the meeting so we had the pleasure of their company all day and they freely shared their growing knowledge. Here are some great ideas that I'm going to add to my bag of tricks:



Emerging Bud Sheaths. I've always peeled the bud sheaths down and pulled them off to prevent the buds from rotting, though this also removes the sheath which does provide structural support to the flower. Here's Quest's better idea, use the sharp edge from the plant tag and orient it perpendicular to the plane of the sheath. Then being careful to avoid the bud, use this to puncture a drainage slit at the base of the sheath perpendicular to the plane of the sheath so any accumulated water will drain but the sheath can still support the flower for best presentation. By using the plant tag unique to that single plant, you don't have to worry about sterility and transferring a virus from plant to plant.

Honeydew and Thrip Larvae. I have often seen the honeydew on emerging buds, the sugary substance exuded by the plant. And then there were these little white specks on them, and they didn't look like scale but they were definitely foreign. Mystery solved, these are thrip larvae and Segundo says the specks can be white, yellow, brown or black. The solution is to keep some isopropyl alcohol and a spray bottle handy and spray the bud with alcohol as soon as you see it. If you see a lot of this, a corrective spray every 7 days for 3 weeks with Orthene will help.





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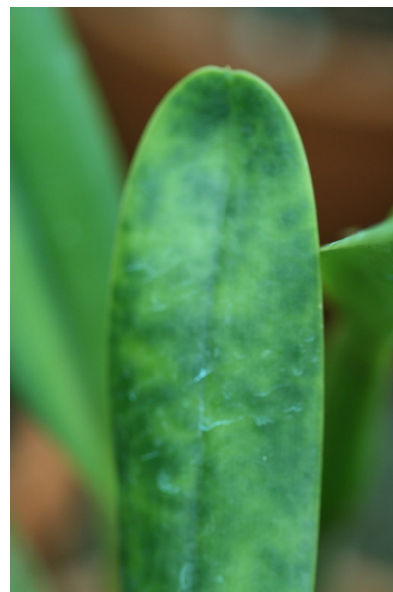
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Fertilizer Burn on Flowers. I fertilize every time I water with a very dilute solution and sometimes the fertilizer gets on the flower. The fertilizer salts will burn the flower leaving a water soaked spot. Segundo says you shouldn't fertilize blooming plants because it will shorten the blooming time. If you don't separate blooming from nonblooming plants, you may end up with fertilizer on the blooms. After you're done

fertilizing, come back with a plain water spray on the flowers to wash the fertilizer off the flowers to prevent spoiling the flowers.

Yellow/Green Leaf Mottling. I have long wondered why my cattleyas have a yellow and green leaf mottling, particularly on the older leaves. Is it a virus? A nutritional deficiency? Cold damage? Segundo says it's a natural consequence of our Florida heat and you will always see some as a result of our hot summers. You can help minimize the mottling by using Epsom salts at 1 tsp/gal each time you fertilize. He also recommends adding a squirt of an antibacterial soap to your fertilizer mix as a simple, nontoxic preventative insecticide, very similar to Safer Soap.



Cutting Tool Sterilizer. I used to use trisodium phosphate (TSP) to soak my cutting shears and sterilize them between uses. Now that TSP has been reformulated so it doesn't contain phosphates, it no longer will sterilize the cutters. Instead, use a 2% bleach solution. Now this will cause the sheers to rust very quickly, so use glass jar instead of a tin can to hold your bleach solution. Pour it out at the end of the day and mix fresh the next day, wash and dry your shears, then spray with WD-40 and they'll last longer.

Terry and I have had the pleasure of hosting many of our speakers, and not only have we made good friends and had lots of fun, we have also benefited immensely from their suggestions. I've never had so many blooming orchids thanks to our incredible speakers who share their knowledge freely!



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