



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

What I Am Potting in These Days

by Harry McElroy, cymbidiuman@msn.com

Both of my grandparents lived on 80-acre farms in Arkansas. The farms provided some income from cash crops but the life had one great advantage. The food on the table was plentiful and the quality was the best I have ever had the pleasure of eating. The one essential element for feeding the thriving family of eight was the vegetable garden. One of my grandmothers coined the phrase that applies to anyone attempting to grow any plant. "Success in Gardening is directly proportional to the dirt under your fingernails".

Grandma's wise observation is so very applicable to the orchid grower/lover. You may grow a new orchid for a while in whatever potting material it came in – but in time the health the orchid will depend on repotting the plant in a media that matches your growing habit and the plant's needs. You will really need to get some dirt or potting media under your fingernails if you want to be a good grower.

My latest venture in potting media centers on "Cypress Mulch". Not "Cypress Blend" but "100% Cypress Mulch" mixed with my own concoction I call the other ingredients. My tests compared seedling cymbidiums of the same size from the same flasks in different media including Orchidata. My concoction gave at least equally good results and I believe better results than anything else I have tried.

The Other Ingredients - are a mix of the following:

- 2 parts Coconut Coir
- 2 parts Perlite (the coarser the better)
- ½ part Purely Organic Fertilizer
- ¼ part Granular Gypsum
- ¼ part Crushed Sea Shells (wash well before using or skip)

Mix all five ingredients well when dry then slowly moisten to fairly wet. Place in a dry place and let dry. The mix seems to ferment and gives off a little heat. Use after it dries.

The Cypress Mulch - The people who make the mulch seem to have a problem getting consistency in particle size. It may be that the grinder blades that makes the mulch gets dull as it is used and the result is that some bags may be coarse and some fairly fine. Select the bags carefully, most are transparent, and you can see how coarse or fine each bag is.

If you are doing Vanda's get a really coarse looking bag, Cattleyas a fairly coarse bag, Paph, Phrags and Cymbidiums need as fine a bag as you can find. If you find coarse pieces in a bag that looked fine when you bought it, either put the big pieces aside and save for Cats or Vandas or put the big pieces in the bottom of the pot.

After opening the bag, use the mulch as quickly as possible. Store unused portions in a sealed container to prevent it from drying out and dry rotting.



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

What I Am Potting in These Days

by Harry McElroy, cymbidiuman@msn.com

Local Sources of Materials - I use a brand of cypress called "Estate Mulch" which is 99% cypress. I buy it from Prestige Mulch located at 6330 Blanding Blvd, Jacksonville Florida 32244. Lately Lowes has a 100% cypress mulch in stock. It looks good but I have not used it.

Select Coco Nut Choir that has no salt, and no heavy metals. If you use salty choir then the procedures in this article will not work. I am using Coconut Coir (CHC) from a hydroponic store Growers Choice South, 8535 Baymeadows Rd Ste 13, Jacksonville FL. (904) 647-7156. CANA Brand CHC is acceptable but Gypsum should be added to the mix. Complete COCO was better but only because it has Gypsum already added. Complete COCO is not available in Jacksonville anymore.

Repotting - The mulch packs into the pot better if it is wet when placed in the pot. I soak mine at least an hour before I use it. I place a wet five gallon bucket of mulch in one end of a concrete mixing pan and the prepared "Other Ingredients" in the other end (about 3 gal of other).

- ★ When Potting Paphs and Phrags and Cymbidium seedlings I use a lot of the other ingredients and a lot less mulch. Paph, Phrag and seedling mix looks very dirty when it goes into the pot.
- ★ Mature Cymbidiums, Cattleyas and Phalaenopsis get potted in dirty looking mix with larger chunks for the Cattleyas and Phalaenopsis.

It seems impossible to determine exact ratios of Mulch to Other Ingredients. What particle size you buy will determine the ratio but you will find that you can use the mix suggested here after you get the feel of how to mix it. How much you water and how much fertilizer you use should also be considered.

Remember, Cypress Mulch is made is made for flowerbeds – not orchid pots. You can use it for Orchids, I do. You need to learn to adjust to use it. It only takes a little Common Sense to make the adjustments. If you cannot make the adjustments then go on and pay \$35 for a Bag of Orchiata, I will stick to \$2 a bag Cypress Mulch. Both should grow fine.

Thinking of another of my grandmothers sage observations about growing Bermuda grass: "The secret to getting Bermuda grass is to get a small patch started in your garden then try to kill it with a garden hoe."