



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Want a Greenhouse for Christmas?

December 2000

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

At last winter is here whether we like it or not. Orchids are snugly placed in windowsills, under lights, etc. While visions of sugarplums may be in the dreams of small children, Orchid growers throughout the temperate region are dreaming of a greenhouse where space is infinite and life (for Orchids) is perfect. Of course greenhouses are not perfect, but for those that have long since filled up every nook and cranny of window space or space under lights it may seem so. There is a lot more to getting a greenhouse than just ordering one from a catalog and many pitfalls awaiting the unwary hobbyist. Here are a few tips.

Before you decide to build a greenhouse or buy one you need to resolve some potential problems. Does your subdivision allow a greenhouse? Not all subdivision covenants allow a freestanding greenhouse. In some, the architectural design of the greenhouse must be approved. In other cases there may be a problem with county zoning restrictions. You will need to become familiar with a variety of different bureaucracies before your greenhouse is finished unless you live in a rural area.

There are also some practical problems. Do you have room in your yard? What you may have once regarded as a beautifully shaded yard may be a poor location for a greenhouse. You may never have thought about the direction your house faced until you try to find a good location for a greenhouse. The ideal situation is to have the south side of your house available for a greenhouse. A northern exposure will provide too little light during the winter. There are ways to solve most problems regarding location if you are creative and willing to spend enough money. For instance, high intensity grow lights can be used to augment light in winter if you must place your greenhouse on the north side of your house.

There is a design and size to fit just about every lot size and need if you are willing to be creative. Even local zoning and covenants problems can be overcome. While greenhouses may not be permitted in some subdivisions, saunas and lighted rooms for hot tubs are permitted. Orchids love hot tubs. You can be creative, but you need to make some decisions before you begin. How much growing space do you need? How much are you willing to spend? How much time do you have to devote to your hobby? Will your spouse let you dig up the Rose Garden? The answer to these questions will help you decide if you really need a greenhouse and if so what kind to build.

Sliding, double pane glass doors can be purchased from salvage yards for just a few dollars. With just a little masonry or carpentry skill they can be converted into a basic, inexpensive greenhouse. The addition of electricity and/or gas to this simple design adds additional cost and more inspections. The other end of the spectrum is the purchase of a very nice aluminum or steel frame design with glass that can be built by a reputable firm with very little time or expertise required of you; only money. This is a decision you need to make based on your own circumstances.



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Here are some other aspects of greenhouse life that should be considered. Natural gas or propane is always cheaper than electricity. Heating in winter is easier than cooling in summer. There will never be enough electric outlets in a greenhouse or enough air movement. Always have all electric outlets on ground default circuits to prevent electrocution. These are the same systems you have in your bathroom. Decide how you will shade your plants before putting the first plant in the greenhouse. Before putting permanent benches in, be sure you know how the sun will move with the season. Alternatively, be sure benches are built in small, easily moved sections.

How will you water your plants? This may seem like an obvious thing to consider, but many new greenhouse owners rely on a single spigot and a long hose. Multiple spigots with short hoses work better. Will you want to use an automatic watering or misting system? If so put it in before plants. How will you fertilize? Will you hang plants? How will you do that? Will hanging plants provide too much shade, block airflow, or be in the direct path of air from your heater? You should get from all this the idea that a properly functioning greenhouse involves much more than just the construction phase. However, many of your future problems will be easier to solve if you have kept your greenhouse design as flexible as possible.

The final piece of advice is the most important. Plan for the worst-case scenario. What happens if your power goes off on the coldest night of the year and you are not home? This happens to numerous Orchid hobbyists each year. Backup heaters, automatic vents that open in summer during power failures can all save your collection that took years to build. Plan for the worst and hope for the best. You will find that touring local greenhouses of your fellow Orchid hobbyists will be a great way to see how those in your area have solved many of the problems listed above. You may also get advice on local sources of materials or construction firms that specialize in greenhouses for Orchid hobbyists. You may also decide that growing under lights or in the windowsill is not so bad after all.

Recommended Equipment and Vendors

- **Turner Greenhouses** - Inexpensive greenhouses for the backyard. Metal frame with either double-poly or fiberglass glazing. Rt 13 Bypass, Goldsboro, NC 27533, 800-672-4770
- **Southern Burner** - Excellent small convective heaters (25,000 BTU) that do not need electricity to run the thermostat. Enough electricity (millivolts) is generated by the pilot light to run the thermostat. Small company with excellent service after the sale. PO Box 885, Chickasha, OK 73023, 800-375-5001, 405-224-5000
- **V J Greenhouse supply** - Supplies shade cloth, heaters, plastic and other materials for a greenhouse. There is also a branch in Charlotte, NC, but they usually get their



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materials from Apopka so I call Apopka and have it shipped directly to me. 500 W Orange Blossom Trail, Apopka, FL 32712-3498, 800-432-6925, 407-886-5555

- **Fog America**- Great way to add humidity to greenhouses. H.P. Norton of Orchidview loves his. 19528 Ventura Blvd. #357, Tarzana, CA 91356-2917 888-248-0379 or 818-885-1023, FAX 818-885-1098.
- **Texas Greenhouse Co., Inc** - Well designed, upscale glass greenhouses. 2524 White Settlement Rd. Fort Worth, TX 76107 817-335-5447 800-227-5447 www.Texasgreenhouse.com
- **Polycarbonate Sheets for glazing a greenhouse.** This material is lightweight, easy to install, and survived 125 mile per hour wind on my greenhouse. There are several brands available, but **Florist Products** in Illinois has provided great service at a good price. PO Box 3190, Barrington, IL 60011