



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Fall Preparations

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

Final Growth Spurt of the Year. The welcome transition to fall is upon us, the temperatures are starting to moderate and the humidity is going down. Our orchids are responding by entering their fall growth spurt when you'll see new green root tips start to emerge. If you have any plants that need to be repotted, this is your last chance. There is still about 6 weeks of the growing season left for them to get re-established.

Expose Phals During First Cold Snap. We usually get our first cold snap around Halloween. Either leave your phals outdoors or place them next to an open window during this cool weather. Phalaenopsis require a significant day to night temperature change to initiate spikes. It usually takes a couple of weeks of these conditions to get all of the phals to put their energy into growing spikes instead of leaves. Phals will be fine exposed to the cool weather even after nights are in the upper 50s F as long as the day temperature rises above 80F. Once daytime high temperatures are below 78-80F, phals need to be kept no lower than 60F at night. Your phals will be on schedule to be spiking by Christmas and in bloom by Valentine's Day.

Clean Up your Plants. Use the delightful fall months to spend some time with your plants: clean them up, remove dead flower spikes, etc.

- ★ *Check for Critters.* You want to make sure that you are only bringing in your plants, and not critters that abound in Florida. Spray them with a hose end sprayer set to flat to give them a bath and remove any spider webs, etc. Clean off leaves with lemon juice, white vinegar or Sprite to remove all that messy build up of fertilizer or minerals on the leaves.
- ★ *Ants, Snails and Cockroaches in Pots.* You don't want to introduce ants and roaches into your porch or home for the winter. Mix up a jug of liquid Sevin and water (1 tsp/gal) and pour through all your pots to eliminate these pests.
- ★ *Check for Sucking Insects.* Remove sheaths to reduce the number of places that insects have to hide. Watch for signs of scale and mealy bugs, any kind of white fuzzy mass. If you do find any pesky critters, you can treat small spots with rubbing alcohol or spray all the plant surfaces with an insecticide. Better yet, add 6 tsp of Bayer Tree and Shrub (1.47% imidacloprid) to your Sevin jug and pour through the potting mix. The systemic imidacloprid will be absorbed through the roots and kill scale and mealybugs from within without your having to spray.
- ★ *Check for Fungus.* Keep an eye out for any kind of moldy looking areas. Molds may show up as dark areas usually on the lower surface of the leaf. If found, spray with Physan or pool algacide.



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Temperatures. Have a plan to protect your plant during the winter months.

- ✦ *Minimum Temperatures.* Protect your phals, vandas and phalaenopsis type dendrobiums when temperatures drop to 50 to 60F and your other plants at 40 to 50F. Get projected hourly night time [low temperatures](#) for your area.
- ✦ *Temperature Differential.* Make sure that your orchids are getting some solar heat to get the day time temperature at least in the 80s. They will not grow well for you in a constant 65 to 70 degree environment. You may have to move your plants to a window with more direct sun to accomplish this. If you have installed artificial lighting to increase light, this may provide enough warmth for your plants.

Isolate those Plants that Need a Rest. Winter is a good time to group plants together that need similar winter conditions.

- ✦ *Dendrobiums.* Group your deep winter resting dendrobiums (nobile, seminobile and Callista sections) together. Restrict all fertilizer after Thanksgiving, water sparingly and provide high light during the winter months. Keep these and similar plants together so that you will know that they need only once a month watering and no fertilizer.
- ✦ *Catasetinae.* Catasetums, clowesias, cycnoches and mormodes as well as a few others like calanthe are dormant during the winter months. They need no water at all until the new growth starts in the spring. Find a place to group these together where you know you will not water them. Some people turn the pots on their sides to remind themselves.