



St. Augustine Orchid Society

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

**Getting Ready for Hurricane Season**  
**What to Do Before, During and After a Storm**  
by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

**Routine Activities During the Summer** – The heat and humidity of summer are upon us, we've got orchids growing outside and they love the afternoon storms. Here are some things to think about.

- ✦ *Coarse Potting Mix* – may be a good choice so if we get afternoon showers every day, the pot will drain and the roots will have the air they love so much around them. Even if you add bark or coconut husk to your mix for a little moisture retention, the clay pebbles or lava rock, charcoal, expanded perlite, etc. in the mix will help the pot drain quickly. The coarser the mix, the more it has to be watered so if it does not rain, you will have to water every couple of days. The extreme would be to use no mix at all, such as when an orchid is mounted or grown in a basket, but without rain you will be watering daily. A sphagnum or pure bark based mix may be much too water retentive to grow successfully outdoors when you cannot control when and how much rain the plant receives.
- ✦ *Precautionary Sprays* – are used by some growers to prevent the ubiquitous critters, bacteria and fungi from damaging your plant; other growers choose only to spray when a problem is detected. If you choose a precautionary spray program, choose one day that you can remember, say the first of each month, and spray with a combination insecticide, a miticide and a fungicide all in one, like Bayer 3 in 1, Orthenex, Safer 3 in 1 etc., using label instructions. Spray early in the morning or late in the afternoon when temperatures are lowest. Spray all the exposed surfaces, pseudobulbs and the bottom and top of the leaves, but avoid spraying the flowers to prevent spotting of your glorious blooms.
- ✦ *Cattleyas* – are big favorites with their beautiful and fragrant blooms. Keep an eye on:

*Pseudobulb Sheaths.* The papery sheath on a pseudobulb (known as a catophyll) protects the new growth from the sun and chewing insects. As the pseudobulb matures, sometimes a space develops between the pseudobulb and the sheath that can accumulate water and if it stays wet for an extended period of time, it will be a home for rot. Gently peel it down so the pocket of water can drain freely.

*Flower Sheaths.* The flower sheath likewise protects the emerging flower and it also provides structural support for the flower stem, but sometimes the extended moisture can cause the flower to rot in the sheath. You can split the sheath and gently peel it down to allow air movement. When you do this, secure the pseudobulb to a stake with a tie strap and then stake the flower stem to the same stake. This will allow the flower to develop for its best presentation.



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- ★ *Phalaenopsis* –are gathering their strength now for the next blooming season. Make sure to repot all phals that need repotting this year before the end of June, so the plant can grow, reestablish and give you great blooms next spring. If you have a summer bloomer (such as those influenced by *Doritis pulcherrima* or the *Amboinensis* section), wait until February to repot.
- ★ *Dendrobiums, Oncidiums and Vandas* – are growing like mad this time of year. Unless there is an obvious problem, let them do their thing!

**Before the Storm.** The tropical storm is coming and we can expect gray rainy weather for a week. Before it happens:

- ★ *Precautionary Spray* – with a stepped up fungicide/bactericide, try one containing quaternary ammonium compounds like Consan or Physan, hydrogen peroxide, or copper like Kocide, liquid copper, Phyton, etc. Copper is very effective for bacterial infections but it should not be used on dendrobiums or plants in bloom and it should be mixed with alkaline water with no fertilizer so the solution does not become acidic.
- ★ *Monopodial Orchids* – like phalaenopsis and vandas, will tend to hold water in the crown of the plant so you may want to turn the pot or basket on its side to prevent water from accumulating in the crown and causing crown rot.
- ★ *Removable Cover* – could be installed over your orchids if your set up would allow it. A pre-engineered system with rolled plastic film or polycarbonate sheets could be set up to prevent all that rain from waterlogging the plants.
- ★ *High Winds* – if it is more than a tropical storm and high winds are predicted, you may want to bring your orchids into the garage or another safe haven. If this is not possible, place the plants low and on their sides. Try to prevent contact with the pathogens in the soil, lay down a protective piece of plastic or something similar before placing your orchids on it. Beware of lost tags, you can wire them to the plant or better yet have dropped a second tag into the bottom of the pot when you repotted last time.

**During the Storm.** Stay inside and congratulate yourself on your preparations.

**After the Storm.** The storm is over and normalcy is returning. Return your plants to your normal set up, then:

- ★ *Inspect* – all your plants carefully for any signs of mechanical damage or orchid diseases and treat any problems you find quickly. If a plant is diseased, isolate it from your other plants until it is healthy again to prevent spread.



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*Black Rot.* The insidious, fast growing orchid killers *Pythium* and *Phytophthora* must be treated immediately. You must quickly cut away the soft, black, rotting tissue until you find healthy growth and then find some of the very expensive fungicide like Aliette or Subdue to apply to the remaining orchid.

*Bacterial Rots.* If you see sunken or black spots on the orchid, take a fresh bottle of hydrogen peroxide out of the medicine cabinet and apply it to the damaged area. You can spray or pour it on. Apply it full strength if the plants are wet or dilute it to 50% strength if your plants are dry.

- ★ *Protective Spray* – with a fungicide/bactericide. This is the most important protective spray because hurricanes carry with them all sorts of unusual fungal and bacterial spores. Your plants have been exposed to conditions very conducive to fungal and bacterial infections and they need a boost. You can use one of the sprays containing quaternary ammonium compounds like Consan or Physan or one of the hydrogen peroxide solutions like ZeroTol. Daconil is a generally available fungicide that is very effective on a broad range of fungal pathogens and copper is effective on both bacterial and fungal pathogens. Dendrobiums and some of the thin leaved orchids are sensitive to copper, so be careful.