

Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

Viveca and Mitch Anderson

April 2010



Mitch has a problem...Viveca has a serious orchid addiction. In less than a year, Viv has accumulated about 40 plants. She has cattleyas, dendrobiums, vandas, oncidiums, phalaenopsis, zygotepetalums and stanhopeas. This past year she grew the orchids on a shady screened porch. When the winter weather arrived, Mitch built her some orchid tree stands for her to grow inside.

With the orchid population explosion, it is time to find a new home for the orchids. Luckily for Viv, Mitch is very handy and is planning to build a series of trellises and 4 x 4 posts to handle the burgeoning collection.

We surveyed the yard with the light meter to find a good location for the orchids where they will receive enough light to rebloom without getting so much light that the leaves will sunburn. The yard is largely shady with pine trees, crape myrtles and a river birch, but there is an area along the south side of the house and porch that receives good morning light with enough tree cover to block the hot afternoon sun. Light levels range from around 2000 to 4000 ft-candles that will be ideal for the light loving cattleyas and dendrobiums, with vandas interspersed in the brightest areas and oncidiums in the shadier areas. The phalaenopsis will probably stay in the screened porch in bright light (around 1000 to 1500 ft-candles) to prevent them from accumulating water in the crowns during rainy weather.

The wild card is finding the best solution for winter orchid care. The inside of the house is warm but has low light levels so even with supplemental grow lights it is still too dark. One solution might be to install canvas covers over the screens in the screened porch during the winter time and house all the orchids on the



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screened porch. A three tiered bench could be placed on the south side of the porch with the high light loving orchids like cattleyas and dendrobiums on the top shelves and the lower light phals on the bottom shelf. Even if the orchids were in less than ideal light, it would be sufficient for them to survive the winter rest period until they can be returned to the outdoors to regain the growing vigor. On cold nights, the sliding door could be left open to keep the temperatures above 50F or a little electrical heater could be used to warm the air.

The next problem to surface will be how best to water the orchids on the porch. The porch doesn't drain so either the plants would have to be carried to the sink and watered or very carefully watered to prevent water damage to the porch. Given Mitch's ingenuity, perhaps he can devise some trays with pebbles so the water could pass through the pots and just accumulate in the pebble tray. Or perhaps he can devise a series of trays with a drain line to a 5 gallon bucket where Viv could water her orchids normally and water draining from the pot would be accumulated in the bucket that could be emptied periodically.

News Update. Since our visit, Mitch has been busy! Here is the new orchid trellis designed to hold a bunch of orchids. You can see Viv has repotted them all into clay orchid pots. By summer, all the orchids should be in an orchid frenzy with blooms soon to follow! You may notice that the new trellis is at about 60% capacity. Think it has something to do with the raffle table?



And then Viv will have to figure out the next place to grow orchids, perhaps the back corner of the yard along the fence with the dappled light?