



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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My Favorite Orchid

March 2013

by Linda Stewart, lindstew@hotmail.com



Tol. Mem. Ralph Yagi – photo courtesy of Orchid Society Council of Victory

When asked to write about my favorite orchid for the newsletter, I had to really stop to think about it. I love miniatures of all types, particularly varieties of Aerangis and the wonderfully fragrant Neofinetia hybrids. But probably the orchids I have enjoyed the longest are the Tolumnias, formerly known as equitant Oncidiums.



Tolu. Willowbank Canary
photo courtesy of Willowbanks

I lived on the Big Island of Hawaii during most of the 1980's and found myself fascinated with these little orchids. They were readily available, and in those days could be purchased for only a couple of dollars apiece. I grew my Tolumnias, or what the locals referred to as "popcorn orchids", with my miniature African violets. They shared a table in front of a south-facing window with light filtered in through a sheer curtain. There was (and still today) no air conditioning in most homes on the Island, so the window was left open just a crack at all times for ventilation. As for potting medium, I didn't



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have a clue. I just grew them in whatever medium they came in at time of purchase. I was equally clueless regarding fertilizer, and although they were fertilized regularly, it was with African violet fertilizer. Although I had received numerous orchids as gifts through the years, I had never successfully grown them before. To my surprise, I found Tolumnias easy. I enjoyed the fact that they remained compact in size, and something was almost always in bloom.

My cultivation techniques have changed somewhat since those early years. I now grow them in charcoal and clay pots, and only repot when they are literally bursting out of their tiny pots or begin to show decline. I water twice a week, fertilizing weekly with a balanced fertilizer at 50% of the recommended strength. The important thing to remember with Tolumnias is that those fine little roots must dry out between watering. Tolumnias like to have their roots crowded, and finding pots small enough used to be an issue until I discovered that 1" to 2" clay pots are generally available at hobby supply stores. Tolumnias are similar to Phalaenopsis in that further blooms can be encouraged on the old flower spike by cutting just below the old flowers and above that next node, and they will frequently continue to re-bloom for weeks.



Tolu. Jairak Rainbow
photo courtesy of Lynn Shaughnessy



Tolu. Orchidom Happy 'Loni' HCC/AOS
Photo courtesy of William Savage

These little orchids offer so much variety in color and form that I can always find something new to add to my collection, so it is fortunate that their space requirements are minimal.. A few years ago, Tolumnias were fairly uncommon here in Florida, and I am glad that they once again have gained in popularity. When in bloom, my Tolumnias still share window sill space with my miniature violets, and my fascination with them has never waned.