



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Gift Ideas for the Orchid Lover

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

Looking for a gift for an orchid fanatic? You may think your orchid lover has one of everything, but rest assured, there is still something that person desperately needs or wants. Here are some ideas for you to ponder, or just leave this article somewhere where your benefactor will see it!

Another Orchid? The easiest gift is another orchid. Your local nurseries and big box stores often have orchids for sale so you can pick out one you particularly like. These outlets typically offer the easier to grow orchids that tend to have longer bloom periods, exactly the reasons that the big box stores carry them. Once your orchid lover has grown orchids for a while, he or she has likely already mastered the art of growing these commonly available orchids and may be ready to try something more exotic.



1. Lc. Acker's Spotlight 'Pink Jewel' HCC/AOS

This monthly selection from the Orchid a Month package offered by Orchids by Hausermann in Chicago was gifted to me many moons ago by my wonderful Stepmom.

Thank you Kathy!

There are many commercial orchid growers that are just waiting for your phone call or email. Thumb through *Orchids* magazine and check out the advertisers. These growers all have a large selection of a variety of different orchids, and they are more than happy to help you select an orchid (or three!). Your orchid lover may have a special affection for orchids from this or that commercial grower. Stroll through their orchid growing area admiring the view and surreptitiously look at the plant tags to see which orchid growers your fanatic prefers (but be careful about removing the tags lest they are brittle and break or get put back in the wrong

pot). Most of the commercial growers will gladly sell you a gift certificate so your orchid lover has the pleasure of scrolling through their paper or online catalogue and deciding which orchid is 'the one'. For those enjoying surprises, some growers offer an Orchid of the Month club where an orchid in bloom or bud will be delivered to the orchidist's doorstep each month.

Fertilizers, Chemicals and Supplies. The orchid grower's budget doesn't just cover new additions to the collection. There is also a need for pots, potting media, wire products, baskets, and more. Some of these products are heavy and expensive to ship, so it is best if you find a local source, perhaps there is a local orchid grower or supplies vendor, perhaps a nursery supply store or hydroponic store. Gift certificates work. And if your orchid grower wants clay orchid pots, the real ones with the deep slots, good luck finding them because they are basically not offered in commerce. Keep an eye on Craig's List or something similar, and if you see a listing for the shallow slatted clay pots, buy them quick.



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Fertilizer. Your orchid grower probably hears all kinds of suggestions about what is the best fertilizer for them to use. You can give them a present that contains the answer. First get a sample of the irrigation water and send it off to JR Peters and ask them to analyze it and give you a fertilizer recommendation. Get the recommended fertilizer from JR Peters or in smaller quantities from an online source. Wrap up the results of the water analysis along with the fertilizer, and your orchid grower will be ready for the growing season.



2. So many different chemicals!

Chemicals. There are lots of chemicals, some very specialized, that your orchid grower may want but not feel comfortable buying because some can be quite expensive. Enter the gift certificate, get one from Pestrong.com or DoYourOwnPestControl.com and let them select their poison guilt free. Just in case your orchid grower is cavalier about personal protection, here's another gift package idea. Buy an organic vapor respirator, nitrile gloves and chemical repellent coveralls and wrap them up with the gift certificate. Make sure your

orchid grower is protected whenever the urge to spray strikes.

Gadgets. For the techies, there are a lot of gizmos that orchid growers can use to quantify different aspects of their growing conditions. All growers need thermometers to tell if the growing area gets either too hot or too cold. Light meters indicate whether their orchids are receiving enough of the right kind of light. For the right grower, water quality testing equipment can help ensure how much of what substance is present in or absent from the irrigation water.

Thermometers. Every orchid growing area needs a thermometer, perhaps more than one. They may not get looked at too often during the glorious spring and fall weather, but when it starts to turn cold in the fall, the orchid grower starts to worry about the night time lows, wondering if it's time to move plants to their protected spot or if that heater is keeping everything warm enough. When spring warms to summer, the daytime high temperatures can become worrisome indicating the need for increased shading and air movement. A min max thermometer is an easy to use and cheap solution costing less than \$25 that can be moved from place to place in the growing area to show how cold or how hot that location got. The old fashioned version is a U shaped thermometer with a continuous reservoir that records the minimum temp on one side of the "U" and the max temp on the other side of the "U", both reset to the current temperature with a magnet. Of course, there are also many digital variations, those with memories up to 28 days that will recall the max



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and min temperatures, ones having remote alarms, etc. If your orchid lover stresses out about the extremes of temperature, perhaps some well placed thermometers will give peace of mind.

Light Meter. As your orchid grower is well aware, different orchids enjoy different levels of light intensity, from the bright light loving vandas to the shade loving jewel orchids. A light meter can give instantaneous readings of light intensity so the orchid grower knows how variable the light is in a given location during different times of the day and different seasons of the year. Look for a meter that is accurate from about 500 to 10,000 foot candles if your orchid lover is growing in natural light, and 500 to 5000 foot candles if growing under lights. Extech sells several different high quality meters from \$100 to \$200 and above, though there are less expensive meters available.

Water Testing. If your orchid grower is technically minded, he or she may be interested in understanding what reactions are occurring between the irrigation water, potting medium and fertilizer. A meter that can measure the pH in the 4 to 8 units range can provide insights into how the fertilizer and degradation of organic matter can contribute to an increase in acidity. A Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) or Electrical Conductivity (EC) meter can tell the grower if potentially toxic salts are concentrating around the roots. The Bluelab Combo Meter can provide this information, although it is a bit pricey at \$200, plus you'll need calibration and pH probe storage solutions. There are relatively cheap colorimetric tests that can be used but beware of the pool test kits that don't measure a pH below 6.8, not a wide enough range to provide meaningful results for the orchid grower.



3 a, b and c. There are lots of gadgets orchid growers use, like these water breakers, shears and Fogg-It Nozzles.

Orchid Toolbox. There are a lot of handy things all orchid growers will use, you can combine several into a tackle box that you can wrap up and tie with a bow or use them as stocking stuffers:

- ✦ Box of single edged razor blades (to remove damaged tissue)
- ✦ Spray bottles of isopropyl alcohol and hydrogen peroxide (to treat pests and disease)
- ✦ 10 Power loupe (to check for small insects like mites)
- ✦ Hemostats (for weed removal)
- ✦ Fogg-It nozzles (high volume, for spraying root of vandas and mounted plants)
- ✦ Cable ties (various lengths, for mounting orchids)



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Magazines and Books. For the bibliophile, there are lots of choices. Membership in the American Orchid Society (\$65) includes the *Orchids* magazine delivered monthly and another \$39 buys the quarterly *Orchid Digest* magazine. Some of the basic orchid culture books have value for the beginner through the advanced grower, two suggestions for growers of all levels of experience are the classic *Home Orchid Growing* by Rebecca Northen and *Understanding Orchids* by William Cullina. If your orchid lover prefers a specific group of orchids, there are good books featuring lots of helpful cultural information about bulbophyllums (by Emly Siuegerist and Bill Thoms), catasetums (by Arthur Holst), cattleyas (by the Chadwicks and Courtney Hackney), cymbidiums (by Kobsukh Kaenratana), dendrobiums (by the Bakers, Bill Lararack and Robert Wood), phalaenopsis (by Steven Frowine), slipper orchids (by Harold Koopowitz), and vandas (by David Grove and Martin Motes). There are good technical books too, like the readable *The Physiology of Tropical Orchids in Relation to the Industry* by Hew and Yong, or reference tomes like *Marschner's Mineral Nutrition of Higher Plants* and Arditti's *Fundamentals of Orchid Biology*, but these last two are not for the faint of heart.

OrchidWiz. The OrchidWiz program is expensive at \$300, but will get plenty of use by the serious orchid grower. The program contains the genealogy of each orchid hybrid registered since the mid 1800's, so your orchid grower can understand the family tree of each orchid. The Baker culture information is included in the program so the species grower can learn all about the best growing conditions. There are pictures galore. There is a My Journal feature where your orchid lover can add pictures and data about each orchid in the collection.



4. Orchid Growing Complex, to the west, courtesy of Enabler-in-Chief Terry Bottom
First the greenhouse, followed by the hoop-houses, pergola and potting shed and then this year...



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5. Orchid Growing Complex, to the east, courtesy of Enabler-in-Chief Terry Bottom
My birthday present was a new slice of heaven, a shade center where stuff grows au natural, protected only by shade cloth.

Benches and Structures. For handy men and women, here's your chance to earn a Get Out of Jail Free card. Build a new orchid growing area for your fanatic. It could be something fairly simple like a new hanging rack or bench to put orchids on. It could be a structure, a pergola, a greenhouse or a shade house to grow orchids. How about a potting shed with potting bench so your orchid grower has a handy place to store supplies as well as a shady area in which to repot orchids.

Terry is my Enabler-in-Chief. He has bought me all these gifts and built the structures to house my ever expanding population of orchids, never complaining. Of course, when he needs a new motor for the boat or a new lens for the camera, well fair is fair!