



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Spring Checklist

May 2001

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Spring is the busiest time of the year for Orchid growers. Given the recent weather in the Carolinas it may be difficult for us to tell that spring has indeed arrived, but your orchids know. Cattleyas have begun to put out new growths and roots in response to increasing day length. Vandas too are starting to grow because high daytime temperatures convince them that they are at home in the tropics. What you do in the next month will have a lot to do with your success as Orchid growers for the next year. Much of what is in my Spring Checklist is just common sense, but that is usually what we forget.

1. Clean Growing Area - Greenhouses have been cramped, as have windowsills and space under lights. Remove Orchids from your growing area and remove all dead material as well as algae. Some hobbyists spray growing space with a 5% Clorox solution to kill bacteria, fungi, and just about everything else. Repair benches or replace surface if it is needed while you have the area clean and open.

2. Organize - Straighten growing space by moving some plants outside or by eliminating non-performing plants. Remove weeds and ferns from pots.

3. Plant Inspection – If your collection is small, future problems can be avoided by carefully examining each plant. Use 10x-reading glasses even if you do not need them for reading. Look for scale, mites, or any signs of damage to leaves or roots. If you find damage on an Orchid look for the culprit that caused it. Tiny nicks on roots or under Phal leaves suggests snails while large chunks and slime trails indicate slugs. These pests have been relatively dormant during winter, but will now feast in summer's warmth. Repotting will eliminate snails and help you find slugs. If you find only minor damage try stale beer for slugs and snail bait for bush snails.

4. Clean Plants - Remove dead tissues around Cattleya bulbs and/or dead leaves. Check the base of dead tissues for sign of scale, especially if leaves died but did not fall from the plant. If scale is found use a soft tissue to wipe them off and then spray with insecticidal soap or light oil. If a major infestation is found the plant should be repotted. When the plant is out of the pot use a sterile toothbrush to gently scrub the underside of rhizomes in Cattleyas and around the base of Phals. If you find heavy infestations on many plants, you may have to resort to harsher pesticides.

5. Straighten Plants – Orchids tend to lean towards the light in winter. Some growers prefer to tie plants up with either wire rings or bamboo stakes if they have fallen over because erect plants are easier to spray and water, and take up less room. In addition new growths and leaves will grow better.

6. Repot – Repot all plants whose media has decomposed and those that have reached too far from the pot. (See last month's Tips column.) Rapid summer growth will quickly replace lost and damaged roots. Newly damaged roots are also less likely to be infected by fungi



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and bacteria in your now clean growing area in the less humid air of spring. Fungi and bacteria will become a problem in mid-summer. Newly repotted Orchids need a convalescence period while they recover. Accomplish this simply by giving them a little extra shade and humidity.

7. Water More – Orchids will use more water in the next month than they will in the heat of summer because of the lower humidity. Water thoroughly when you do water and review the moisture requirements of the different groups of Orchids you grow. In general, Cattleyas and Dendrobiums need to dry thoroughly before being watered while Phals and Paphs like to dry some but need constant moisture. Phrags and Bulbophyllums crave moisture while most of the Vanda group wants high light, abundant water, and lots of air movement. Air movement is just as important for Orchids in summer as during the winter, but for different reasons. Now it is important to keep leaves from overheating while in winter it was to keep bacteria and fungal infections at bay.

Work hard now and you will enjoy watching your Orchids grow and bloom all summer and fall.

Sterilizing Tools – A propane torch works well on most metal tools. This kills virus as well as bacteria and fungi. A concentrated solution of Tri Sodium Phosphate (cleaning agent) will have the same effect on flammable items, but will take 10 minutes to work. Similarly, a 10% Clorox solution will sterilize surfaces such as potting benches, but will quickly damage metal tools.