



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Orchids in Summer

August 2001

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

It has been a wonderful summer so far with no hurricanes and relatively cool conditions, i.e. no 100-degree days. There are few years when evening temperatures are in the 60s in July. Orchids love these conditions and the greenhouse is full of beautiful sights and especially great fragrances. Encyclias are one of the most fragrant groups of Orchids, but are often not part of hobbyists' collections because of their rather small brown-green flowers. Each species has a unique scent and our family knows them not by their scientific name, but by their fragrance. There is the "Banana Cream Pie Orchid" (*Enc plicata*), the "Pop Tart Orchid" (*Enc alata*), and so on. Besides the large-flowered Cattleyas that provide fragrance during the day, there are also night fragrances as well from *B glauca*, *Bc Jimminey Cricket*, and the like.

If you are an indoor or under lights hobbyist and cannot grow these relatively high light Orchids, pick up some of the fragrant *Phalaenopsis*. *Phal belina* (formerly known as the Borneo form of *violacea*), *Phal violacea*, *Phal fasciata*, *Phal luddemanniana*, and most of the other summer blooming *Phal* species are extremely fragrant. While they grow more slowly than hybrids, they are relatively easy to grow and flower under lights and put out one of the most intense sweet fragrances in the Orchid world.

Many late summer standard Cattleyas are blooming early this year, especially the yellow hybrids such as *Blc Toshie Aoki* and *Lc Mary Ellen Carter 'Dixie Hummingbird'*. Other hybrids usually in bloom in September are filling sheaths with growing buds. In the past, I always assumed that changes in blooming season were related to some aspect of culture in my greenhouse, but with this column and the EMAIL from readers, I have discovered that often many growers report the same thing and this year is no exception. On a visit to Carter & Holmes in Newberry, South Carolina in July, Gene Crocker noted the same early blooming phenomenon in their greenhouses. They are far inland of Wilmington, NC and are not affected by sea breezes.

There are a few successful cultural experiments worth noting this summer. The first is my continued attempts to resurrect Paphs that have lost their roots. Mature plants recover relatively easy by repotting into smaller pots that fit their remaining roots, but not seedlings. Books suggest putting plants in plastic bags with a little media until root growth begins, but this has not worked well.

In a recent study at the here at the University, we needed to grow plants in a media that contained absolutely no nutrients. The only thing that worked was nylon fiber batting packed into a pot. When plants were removed they had developed an incredible root system in the Nylon. So... I tried Nylon on my sick Paphs. It did not work as the sole media, but when the stem of the Paph below the leaves was wrapped with nylon, placed in a small pot with standard media packed around the Nylon so that the nylon was compressed around the stem just about every plant put out new roots. If a seedling had absolutely no roots and was small it was difficult to stabilize the plant. This was solved by tying the plant and nylon



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to a small bamboo stake, which was then placed in the pot as before. The bamboo stake held the plant in place until roots could become established. When these plants were removed after six months, most of the stakes had rotted away. The Nylon allows enough air movement to get the roots growing, and then encourages roots to penetrate down to the bottom of the pot. If roots do not go to the bottom of the pot as would normally happen without the Nylon, the media gets soggy and the plant again loses its roots. If you have a favorite plant that is on the way out try it. I plan to try it on my next Phal that loses its roots.