



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Orchid Greenhouse Etiquette

May 2002

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[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Years ago, a renowned South Florida orchid hybridizer told a group of novice growers how he had let an elderly gentleman and his wife into his stud house. In those days this was seldom done because of the uncertain risk of transferring disease and the intense competition that existed between commercial growers. But this was a very nice gentleman that had just a few orchids. A sudden phone call interrupted the tour with the couple left to look around for a few minutes. When he returned, the elderly couple thanked him for this wonderful opportunity and as a token of their gratitude noted that they had cleaned all of the dead flowers off the plants. In the bottom of the garbage can was just about every seedpod made that winter.

The purpose of retelling this story was that there are certain rules of orchid etiquette that should be followed when visiting a greenhouse, whether commercial or not. Most novice orchidists are not aware of these unwritten rules and often learn "the hard way". Orchid etiquette is not intentional thievery. Removing keikis or switching tags to get a cheaper price are illegal. Etiquette is avoiding the little things that irritate people, which can also cause great harm or damage. Many commercial growers do not let the public visit their growing areas because of their past experiences and some of the most expert hobbyists also refuse visits from all but the most well-known growers. Here are a few of the dos and don'ts that will make you visit a pleasant one for both grower and visitor.

1. Never take a purse, especially a large one, into a growing area. Growers are not as concerned about thievery as the damage done as the purse trails along the aisles or when the purse smashes into flowers as you lean over to smell a nice blossom. Growing houses are different than displays areas, as the typical one does not waste space leaving just a little room for you and none for your purse.
2. Do not touch flowers unless you ask. Some flowers are extremely delicate and easily damaged while others can be handled. Others will eject their pollen with even a slight touch. This is especially important for plants on Show Tables or at judging centers. Even a little damage can disqualify the perfect flower.
3. Never pull tags from pots as you may not get them back into the same pot. If the grower is nearby, ask about parentage or if removing a tag is permissible. Be sure you get the tag back in exactly the same place.
4. Obviously, it is necessary to remove a plant from a bench if you are going to purchase it. Often they will be growing into an adjacent pot. Do not use a pocketknife or other utensil to help. If plants do not easily separate from one another ask for help. Viruses are easily spread by pocket knives. In stud houses or in non-commercial greenhouses never pick up a plant without permission as roots, flowers, and leaves can be unintentionally damaged.



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5. Never remove a flower, dead leaf, or any other part of a plant without permission. While viruses are not easily transmitted, bacteria and fungi can be moved from plant to plant with ease.
6. Seedlings growing in flats are not usually for sale. Removing a plant or two disturbs the others. Often there will be seedlings already potted into individual pots that are for sale. Ask before disturbing a flat.

It takes many years to learn all of the unspoken rules and especially those peculiar to individual nurseries. Most orchid growers are generous with both their knowledge and experience, so developing a good relationship is important. They can tell you all about the many hybrids and clones that have more history behind them than is in the books. There is also more to growing orchids than can be grasped from the pages of any book and hobby growers are an important source of information.

Remember, when in doubt, ask, and you will make many orchid growing friends in the process of learning the fine points of "Orchid Etiquette".