



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Coconut in Potting Mixes

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Having repotted several hundred orchids of various kinds in many media allows me to say, without question, that coconut husks degrade and under the right conditions can do so quickly. Medium coconut husks mixed into Paph mixes did extend the life of these mixes for as much as a year, doubling the time between repotting.

Mini-Catts potted in 100% coconut husks and kept moist required repotting after a year because the medium was almost totally degraded. A similar experiment with standard Cattleyas substituting coconut husks for fir bark in a mix that also contained charcoal, #3 sponge rock, tree fern and redwood bark was not successful as the coconut chips degraded too quickly. The same thing was found several years ago using cork chips. Even though coconut husks degrade slowly in nature, under constant moisture and fertilizer they degrade too quickly.

In mixtures of 25% medium coconut chips, 25% #3 sponge rock, and 50% ProMix for Phals, I also found that the coconut chips degraded within a year. However, lava rock alone as the medium with an inch of coconut chips on top proved to be a very good medium for Phals. The coconut chips gradually degraded falling into the lava rock. Both of the Phal experiments took place in standard clay pots with just one hole in the bottom. Lava rock holds an amazing amount of water and it was surprising that the coconut chips did not degrade as quickly as they did with other products found in orchid media.

Your repotting chores should be completed by now for most genera so that the root system can reestablish before cool weather arrives. Plants can now quickly use water and fertilizer because they are in active growth. If you fertilize, this is the time to do so. Heat will now be the problem for greenhouse and outdoor growers, while indoor culture must contend with air conditioning systems drying both air and plants.

Two products were found in the past couple of months that are worth reporting. The first is a slow release fertilizer marketed in small quantities as Dynamite in Home Depot stores. This seems to be exactly the same product as Nutricote, which can be difficult to find except in large quantities. The high nitrogen form, 18-6-8, and the even fertilizer, 13-13-13, are available in 180-day release form. At Lowe's I found a great watering wand sold under the Garden Plus brand. Get the 37"-52" Adjustable Head Watering Wand type if you have a greenhouse or water hang-up type baskets. It puts out a fine, even spray and the telescope feature allows easy watering of plants high in the greenhouse. It even has a nozzle that can be adjusted to spray water in just about any direction.