



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Twenty Years of Tips

December 2013

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

After 20 years, I am putting down my pen (or keyboard), at least when it comes to the monthly column. I do plan to write the occasional column when something new comes along or there is a new problem to solve. After 20 years, it seems as if the column has covered everything one could ever ask about orchid growing, but I know there will be new issues. We have archived all of the old columns delivered via email for new hobbyists or for those looking for some item published in a past column. They can be found on the web at <http://www.rose4art.com/orchid-growing-tips-index-to-articles.htm>.





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Looking over all those old columns reminded me how many of the new products that came along never quite lived up to the hype, but also that there were some that did. There were also a number of recommendations I made that followed all published material on orchid culture that are no longer followed because good scientific studies showed they did not work. The use of fertilizers with lots of phosphate (middle number) comes to mind. It still bothers me to hear speakers and new books continuing to make the same statements.

Some wonderful new products have come along that solved age-old problems, while other products that worked well are no longer available. Scale, once the bane of every cattleya grower, is now easily controllable through hormonal pesticides such as Distance. Fertilizers that are easy to use and avoid the burn that used to be common are available, e.g. Nutricote. Even so, it still takes time to learn to grow orchids because there are so many different kinds, many with particular requirements of water and temperature.

I have tried to pass along a simple principle over these 20 years; follow the KISS principle (Keep it Simple). While you, as a hobbyist, may not grow your orchids as fast as a commercial grower, your orchids will still thrive. Everyone can grow great orchids without all of the exotic fertilizers and media. More harm has been done trying to grow the way commercial nurseries do than can be imagined.

The best way to learn how to grow orchids is to ask advice from those who have already figured it out. That will always be the best place to start. Most orchids are not delicate and can handle just about everything we do to them with the exception of over-watering, over-fertilizing and over-repotting. It is difficult for the new hobbyist to avoid this, which is why so many kill their first orchid. Once the novice grasps a few terms and concepts, growing orchids becomes easier as does learning from books and fellow hobbyists.

Orchids are more available now than ever before. Supermarkets, hardware stores and many other retail outlets have them available in bloom, yet there are now fewer orchid hobbyists than a decade ago. Perhaps the availability and the fact that it is easy to replace them make the prospect of growing them less interesting. Just like every hobby, there will always be those people that enjoy the challenge of growing one orchid and then another until you have mastered it. Of course, when it comes to orchids, there are always different genera or more unusual orchids to find and learn to grow. That is what makes this such a special hobby.