

## The Importance of Staking

Orchids growing in the wild don't have the benefit of a caretaker to primp and preen them. But their only purpose is to attract a pollinator, not please us humans. If we grow orchids to display in our homes or exhibit at shows and orchid society meetings, we want them to look their best. Our regimen of giving our orchids the best of care must include staking the flowers. Some beginners may not consider staking part of orchid growing, or may be too intimidated to try their hand at it. But the flowers are the reward we grow orchid plants for and we should help them present those flowers in their most glorious beauty. This is not to imply that all orchids must be staked, but there are some orchids and some cases where staking is of great benefit.



LEFT: A properly staked inflorescence will produce a beautiful presentation of flowers! *Phalaenopsis* Mem. Daisy Cohen 'Quick' AM/AOS grown by Savilla Quick. Photo: © G. Allikas

### Why Stake?

It is essential to stake an orchid inflorescence if the plant is being transported to a meeting or show. The movement of travel can easily damage flowers or even break an inflorescence. Many orchids will present their flowers in a more pleasing manner if the inflorescence is staked. Just today I was looking through the shade house and found a *Cattleya intermedia* inflorescence that had grown quite tall over Easter weekend. It was starting to bend and the weight of the four flowers was also making the pseudobulb bend as well. Had I left this spike to develop on its own the flowers would be nodding downward. That doesn't matter to a bee but it does to us who want to admire the flowers! Commercial phalaenopsis growers always stake inflorescences, starting early to create a beautifully shingled presentation of flowers. Most orchids with long, multifloral inflorescences show better if staked. Both single-flowered and multifloral Paphiopedilum hybrids should be staked to allow the inflorescence to develop straight and

stay that way. Many cattleyas, especially those with long flower spikes or heavy flowers benefit from staking. In short, any orchid may be improved by staking its inflorescence excepting some species and of course, orchids with pendant inflorescences.

### Materials

As the name suggests, staking involves a rigid stake and devices to fasten the orchid inflorescence to it. The stake can be galvanized metal wire of varying gauges or bamboo. Bamboo is rigid and will provide good support for a phalaenopsis inflorescence and can provide a decorative element. Galvanized wire will also offer good support and has the advantage that it can be bent. This is useful for orchids with pseudobulbs where the stake cannot be placed close enough to the spike. Some galvanized wire stakes are made to firmly clip on to the edge of a clay pot. These are useful with tall pseudobulbs when firm support is needed for the pseudobulb as well as the flower spike. Green or brown twist ties and plastic "dragonfly" clips are currently among the most popular fasteners. Both offer quick and secure support. Twist ties are sometimes covered with a piece of tied raffia for decoration. Floral tape can be used with galvanized wire to gently arch a heavy inflorescence. We like to use thin gauge electrical solder as a fastener. It is flexible enough to quickly wrap and secure an inflorescence and stake of any length, and it can be reused. The silver-gray color is discreet.

### Method

There are many ways to stake an inflorescence and there are not really any "wrong" or "right" techniques, although AOS judges do frown on plants with flowers that have been excessively manipulated into position. The most important rule of staking is to be careful! A developing inflorescence can seem amazingly plastic and bendable and then a moment later, be as brittle as glass and break in your fingers. It is almost impossible to correct poor flower presentation once the flowers are fully open, so starting early not only makes the job easier, it also minimizes the potential tragedy of a broken spike. Phalaenopsis inflorescences should be staked when they are 6-12" tall depending on the particular hybrid or species. For an arching, shingled inflorescence you want the first tie to be an inch or two below the first bud. Other multifloral orchids such as oncidiums and cymbidiums can also be staked once

the spike is long enough to place a tie below the first bud. Do not cut the stake until the inflorescence is close to its maximum length so that additional support can be added as it develops. Cattleyas and similar orchids can be staked once the buds begin to twist from their upside down position.

#### Why Stake?

While staking is a matter of personal taste, there are certain orchids that usually need some help presenting their flowers. I personally feel that a lot of hardware on a flowering orchid plant detracts from the flowers' beauty so I try to keep staking to a minimum and as inconspicuous as I can make it. Staking is an important part of grooming your orchids so they present their beautiful flowers to their fullest potential.

[Here is additional information.](#)

RIGHT: Mike Coronado of R.F. Orchids is an expert at staking orchids.  
Photo: © G. Allikas



*Greg Allikas  
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## Resources

\* The [monthly checklists](#) on the AOS website provide a convenient guide for orchid care on a month-to-month basis. Like all plants, orchids have seasonal growth patterns. Recognizing these patterns is an enjoyable part of the orchid hobby and gives us a closer tie to the natural cycles of life.

\* If you have just signed up for this newsletter, you can see what you have missed in past issues. Previous newsletters are archived [right here](#) .

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