



## St. Augustine Orchid Society

[www.staugorchidsociety.org](http://www.staugorchidsociety.org)

### Fall Preparations

by Mike Heinz

Getting Ready for Winter

As the days shorten and the temperatures drop those of us that grow all, or some, of our plants outside are faced once again with the problem of bringing our plants inside for the winter.

**Preparing the Protected Area.** The first problem, whether we like it or not, is that there are more plants outside than we put out there in the spring. No matter what we tell ourselves when we start each new growing season, about not having any more room, we still manage to squeeze one (or twenty) more plants into the space we have. Now we have to squeeze those same plants into our winter growing area, which did not get any larger over the summer. This causes for some very creative thinking, and making superb use of the little space we have.

- Get some tiered benches that allow you to go up, as well as back. These can be made out of strong fence wire with side braces, or wood planks on top of pots or bricks.
- Next, reduce your inventory, give that division to somebody that admired it during the meeting when you put it on the show table. Now it's their problem of how to winter it.
- Plants that can be repotted in the late summer or early fall should be looked at closely, a plant in a 8" pot might divide into two 4" pots, and fit on the shelf better.

OK we've got the area set up, the spouse has been convinced that this new idea/area will work, and we're ready to start the move. Not so fast!

- Is the area you're going to use going to be damaged by the excess moisture you're going to add when you water/mist your plants? Wall board will not stand up to the constant barrage of moisture. Maybe the back patio can be enclosed with plastic, or the pool enclosure can be used. Back porches have been turned into winter greenhouses in more than one household.
- Will there be enough light for your plants, the light we need to see, and enjoy our plant, is not enough for them to grow well. A trip to Lowes, or the local hardware store might be in order to get one, or more, four foot fluorescent light strips. You'll have to decide what plant needs to go closest to the light to receive the right amount of light.

**Clean Up your Plants.** Use the cooler winter months to inspect your plants. While you're inspecting them, take the opportunity to clean up your plants, remove dead flower spikes, etc. Clean off leaves with lemon juice to remove all that messy build up of fertilizer or minerals on the leaves. Remove sheaths to reduce the number of places that insects have to hide.

- *Check for Critters.* We want to make sure that we are only bringing in our plants, and not critters that abound in Florida. In my area, it's not uncommon to find a green, or black snake curled up in a pot or basket, and although they aren't a problem to the plant, they can be a real problem to the person they drop on from the



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basket hung high in the growing area. Spiders in the growing area a good thing to keep the bug population under control, but some of us have an aversion to our eight legged (friends?). Spray them with the garden hose to give them a bath and remove any spider webs, etc.

- *Ants, Snails and Cockroaches in Pots.* We also have a huge crop of banana bugs/ palmetto bugs as well as ants that may have taken up residence in your orchid pots. The roaches do considerable damage because they eat the nice tender new growths on our plants. You don't want to introduce ants and roaches into your porch or home for the winter. Mix up a jug of liquid Sevin and water (1 tsp/gal) and pour through all your pots to eliminate these pests.
- *Check for Sucking Insects.* Scale, mealybugs and other insects will find the conditions as nice as your orchids do. Watch for signs of scale and mealy bugs -- any kind of white fuzzy mass -- or eaten areas on your plants. If you do find any pesky critters, you can treat small spots with rubbing alcohol or spray all the plant surfaces with Orthene, Malathion or something.
- *Check for Fungus.* As you clean off your plants (both sides of the leaves) make sure that you keep an eye out for any kind of moldy looking areas. As the temperatures stay cooler, molds may show up as dark areas usually on the lower surface of the leaf. . If found, spray with Physan or Consan to protect any open surfaces from your cleanup and to reduce the growth of any unwelcome molds or rots.

**Temperatures.** Have a plan to protect your plant during the winter months.

- *Minimum Temperatures.* Protect your phals, vandas and phalaenopsis type dendrobiums when temperatures drop to 50 to 60 F and your other plants at 40 to 50F. Get projected hourly night time low temperatures for your area from Wunderground.
- *Temperature Differential.* Make sure that your orchids are getting some solar heat to get the day time temperature at least in the 80s. They will not grow well for you in a constant 65 to 70 degree environment. You may have to move your plants to a window with more direct sun to accomplish this. If you have installed artificial lighting to increase light, this may provide enough warmth for your plants.

**Isolate those Plants that Need a Rest.** Winter is a good time to group plants together that need similar winter conditions. D. biggibum and R. digbyana both need high light and less water during the winter months. Keep these and similar plants together so that you will know that they need only once a month watering. Catasetinae (catasetum, clowesia, cychnoches and mormodes), calanthe, some dendrobiums (nobile, seminobile and Callista sections) need no water at all until the new growth starts in the spring. These can also be grouped where you know you will not water them. You can flag these plants with a special color tape or plant tag so you can identify them easily.



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Enjoy having your plants where you can tend for them, and make the mandatory resolution that you will not add any more plants next year, no matter what, because you absolutely have no more space for even one more plant. The rest of us will laugh, or at least smile, because we're no better at keeping that resolution than you are.