

Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

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In April, 2006, I won a fine looking orchid as a door prize at Southern Horticulture. It was quite impressive as it was in bloom and even had a tag that said its name was 'Mauve'. Using Google, I searched to find out what I had won. I found the American Orchid Society web-site, downloaded a Phalaenopsis culture sheet and dutifully kept my new orchid on the east facing porch behind a column to avoid direct sunlight.

During the next 3 years the number of orchids in my care inexplicably grew to over 80. I have absolutely no idea how that happened.

Where to put a growing orchid population?

I first tried snap-together plastic shelving but quickly discovered the stacked shelving blocked most of the sun needed by my cattleyas.

Next I fabricated a low rack, 4 ft. by 8 ft., made of PVC pipe and vinyl coated wire shelving with window screen draped over the top as a sunscreen. It had little wheels so I could roll it around my pool enclosure to get the best sun angle and get them out of rainy or cold weather. It was difficult to maneuver and scratched the flooring so I went looking for a better way.



Two months ago, while at the Saturday morning Master Gardener session at Ace Hardware, I noticed their plant display racks. I made note of the manufacturer, went to their website and ordered a display rack to use as a small mobile greenhouse for my Cattleya type orchids.

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Terry Bottom had plenty of ideas of how to modify the rack for its intended use. We covered the top and upper end caps with overlapping sheets of clear plastic corrugated roofing panels and added some metal channel tubing so I can use wiggle-wire to attach clear plastic sheeting in the winter. I just received some 30% shade cloth ordered from a greenhouse supply store so the next task will be to figure out how to put it over the top of my new rack without tearing the material.

My thought is that during the winter I will have my rolling rack out in the sun on the good days. At night I will have the clear plastic sheet covers in place and keep it up close to the house with a small ceramic heater and small fan to keep the temperature at the proper level. I sure hope that works out as I know I will need to have some venting to allow excess moisture to escape while keeping everything warm enough.

For my phalaenopsis, I do use the snap-together plastic shelves placed behind a white roll down shade so that in the direct west sunlight, it receives about 1,500 foot candles of light. My vandas hang from a PVC pipe contraption I made and it is covered with window screening which lets through about 4,500 foot candles. I filled the bottom pipes with sand to give weight to the structure so it does not blow over (again) on windy days. During the colder winter nights, the phals and vandas do get to come inside to stay warm.



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All of my cattleyas are now growing in a very loose media sold by the SAOS. I fertilize once a week and water every 2 days if it is hot. My phals are growing in a mixture with a little coconut husks mixed in with the cattleya mix. I fertilize them every 2 weeks and water about every 4 to 5 days, depending on the moisture left in the pot. I use clear plastic pots for my phals so I can see the condensed moisture on the inside. If I see moisture, I wait another day to water. The vandas are fertilized once a week and watered at least once each day.

