

Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

Penny Halyburton and Michael Rourke, phalyburton@comcast.net
November 2011

When orchid obsession teams up with engineering know-how, you end up with a haven for orchids. Penny Halyburton got the orchid bug several years ago and is now happily pampering all her lovelies. Husband Michael Rourke used his engineering and craftsman's prowess to create orchid growing areas that are both beautiful and functional.



The orchid pavilion has some ingenious design features. Treated 4 x 4's provide the structure with cross bracing for orchid benches. Metal pipe racks (metal conduits within PVC pipe) provide plenty of hanging space. Some are retractable to compensate for seasonal light level changes. Removable panels built from PVC pipe fit with 50% shade cloth drop into the top of the structure and above the retractable pipe racks to provide shade in summer and maximum light in the spring and fall. Spray heads are strategically located to allow easy watering.

Michael also makes custom baskets that are partitioned to allow 2 or 4 pots to be hung from the same post. These baskets can accommodate any size pots.



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And then there are the orchids. Penny's favorites are the cattleyas because they are so showy and fragrant. She has lots of oncidiums that are in spike this fall, which pleases Michael because they are his favorite. There are also phalaenopsis, dendrobiums and epidendrums in bloom. Penny's green thumb extends to the beautiful zygotetals that are healthy and full and getting ready to explode with flowers. Everyone loves zygos in bloom, but few can grow them in our heat.

A second orchid growing area graces her 'leaf garden' where many hanging orchids are grown. Vandas are in the front so they'll get the most sun. This area has a spray system so the vandas get plenty of the water they love. Other varieties thrive there in the shadier areas.



Penny bloomed an incredible *Stanhopea wardii* with three flower spikes this summer, wow!



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So how does Penny do it? She is growing outdoors under tall oak leaves so her plants get plenty of fresh air from spring through fall. The engineered structure allows her to locate her orchids in sunnier or shadier areas depending on their preference. She supplements the rainwater with irrigation well water, especially during this dry year. Plants are potted in the SAOS coarse mix. She top dresses the pots with Dynamite and also uses water soluble cal mag fertilizer. Penny spends a lot of time talking to her orchids.

The first winter Penny and Michael spent a lot of time moving orchids to keep them out of the cold. Last year Michael built a rolling rack that holds all the orchids. It's huge, about 3 ft wide and 8 ft long with three benches (covered with horse fencing to provide structural support) and pipes for hanging stock. It can be rolled into the driveway on warmer days so the plants can enjoy the sun and the air movement and then into the garage when a cold snap heads our way.



Penny wonders sometimes how she ever found the time to make sure our county elections went off without a hitch. Since she retired, she's found that 24 hours aren't enough to do the things she loves, dote on her orchids, cats and Michael, cook up a storm and keep an immaculate house and yard. Seems like she's good at everything she does!