

Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

Bob and Debbie Sandy

November, 2009



Bob and Debbie Sandy have it made in the shade...of fabulous oak trees that are providing a great habitat for growing orchids in their backyard. They are growing all kinds of orchids, phalaenopsis, vandas, cattleyas, dendrobiums, oncidiums, just about anything that strikes their fancy. They've got a lot of shade from the oak trees during the spring through fall growing season so they don't need any shadecloth to protect the plants from the intense summer sun. The dappled light is sufficient for the plants to produce plenty of blooms, as you'll see in these pictures. The canopy thins during the fall and winter months letting in more light to the plants, which can handle the increased light because the

temperatures are cooler.



Bob has been busy creating different homes for their orchids. He has built a covered shade structure using 4 x 4's in the corners with 2 x 8 ceiling joists and stringers. There is a ceiling fan to keep air moving. There is corrugated plastic on the top of the structure to prevent waterlogging the orchids during tropical storms and hurricanes.

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Debbie has been busy making drop curtains to protect the plants from wind and cool. The curtains are vinyl (it helps that she works with Jeannette Pacetti at Custom Marine Canvas!) The curtains are kept tied up to the top structure during the warm months and then dropped to the ground during cold weather. If it gets cold enough, a little electric heater can be placed in the structure to warm things up.



The vandas have their own home during the warm growing season. They are hung from a rod suspended between posts under the oak trees. There is lots of air that the vandas love so much and the roots look plump and happy. When the temperatures start dropping, the vandas will be brought into the shade structure to overwinter. The curtains can be raised during the day and lowered in the evenings so the vandas will get the air they crave but still be protected from the cold air that they loathe.

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It's an orchid truism, you never have enough room to grow all the orchids you want to grow. For extra space, you can attach them to 4 x 4's with pot clips or you can attach them directly to your oak tree. Bob came up with an unusual way of doing this. Using a plant ring upside down, he dropped the pot in the ring that would normally stake the plant upright, and then hung the plant from a nail in the tree through the wire that would normally attach to the pot. Ingenious!

The orchids get watered by Mother Nature supplemented by hand watering. The slow release fertilizer Dynamite is used primarily with occasional doses of water soluble fertilizer. Their approach to orchid growing is to let nature tend to its own, they don't baby their orchids. They have a set up that will protect their orchids during the weather extremes and allow them to grow naturally the rest of the time. Their approach seems to be working, look at all the blooms!

