



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Late Winter in North Florida

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

After the winter solstice, the sun rises higher in the sky and the days begin to lengthen a minute or so each day. Our plants respond to these subtle differences and we start to see new green root tips, a sure sign that our plants are rousing from their winter rest. We usually water half as frequently in winter as we do in summer, but those green root tips suggest it's time to ramp up the watering frequency. When the winter weather is warm and sunny, water more often, almost like you do during the growing season, while during cold gray periods, revert to your more infrequent winter watering schedule.

The green root tips also signal the beginning of the repotting season. We've all be told that the best time to repot your orchid is when it is initiating new root growth because the new root system will allow the plant to quickly recover from transplant shock. Dedicate a bench or section of your growing area to stockpile plants destined for repotting that week. As you tour your growing area, look for overgrown cattleyas with new green root tips and dormant *Catasetinae* that have the very beginning of green new growths. Move them to your 'To Be Repotted' area, and get busy situating them in their new homes. If you have some of the fragrant summer blooming phals that need repotting, this is a good time to repot them so they can reestablish before sending up their bloom spikes.



Condensation inside a sheath can cause the emerging bud to rot, gently peel sickly looking sheaths down to open it to the air.



Dried sheaths usually do not present a problem, in fact they protect the emerging buds from mechanical damage and chewing pests.

Cattleyas. The winter blooming season is upon us. If the flower sheath is a yellow sickish color or looks wet, consider gently peeling it apart or splitting it open with a sterile blade to allow condensation from fluctuating day night temperatures to dissipate, so that the emerging buds do not rot inside the sheath. Dried sheaths are not a problem, except that you are anxiously awaiting the flowers to enlarge and break free.

Dendrobiums. The soft cane dendrobiums are forming their buds now. They will be putting on their show in the next month or two. Keep them dryish, watering only once or twice a month, and coolish, protecting them when temperatures are projected to drop below 38F or so. They may drop some of their leaves during the winter, but never fear, you will be able to see the flowers better on the leafless canes. The hard cane dendrobiums really dislike the



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cool weather and start dropping leaves below 60F. Keep them cozy in their winter homes for another few months.



Clowesia Grace Dunn 'Chadds Ford' AM/AOS is one of the late winter blooming varieties that flowers profusely from leafless pseudobulbs.



The best time to repot *catasetums* is when you first see the new green growths emerging at the base of the pseudobulbs.

Catasetinae. This is the flowering season for the winter blooming genera like the small flowered *Clowesias* and *Mormodes*, and their intergeneric hybrids including *Fredclarkearas* and *Mormodias*. The energy they have stored up in the fat pseudobulbs allows them to flower beautifully, even from leafless bulbs. These are the last *Catasetinae* to go dormant, so they will be the last to break dormancy in the spring. The summer blooming *Clowesias* and *Catasetums* may have gone dormant months ago and are now slowly waking up. Check them weekly for signs of new green growths. This is the best time to repot them, when the growths are just beginning and they have not yet starting growing new roots. You can cut away old and tired growths and roots and orient the new growth toward the center of the pot. The new growths will start rooting in a matter of days and will quickly fill the pot. Avoid the urge to water until the roots and new growths are about 5 inches long and the new leaves have unfurled.

Phalaenopsis. Your spring blooming phals should have tall spikes now with some buds beginning to open. It is not too late to stake those spikes for their best presentation. Constant air circulation with nighttime temperatures above 60F are essential to avoid *Botrytis*-spotted blooms. Water carefully to keep flowers dry and to minimize risks of soft rot in the fleshy leaves. If you grow the summer blooming *phalaenopsis*, you can repot them now so the plants can reestablish their root system before they start flowering mid-year.

Vandaceous. Many of the African angraecoids and popular Thai hybrids are blooming. Vandaceous orchids as a whole are fairly cold intolerant although there are some species from higher elevations that withstand lower temperatures. If you are unsure of your plant's genetic background, keep nighttime temperatures above 60F. This is particularly true of the widely hybridized *Vanda sanderiana* that has large two-toned flowers and species of the fragrant genus *Aerides*. Some *Vanda* species like *coerulea*, *denisoniana* and *tessellata* are more cold tolerant as are *Renanthera*, *Rhynchostylis* and many members of the colorful



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small flowered vandas previously known as *Ascocentrums* and *Ascocendas*, that are comfortable down to 50F. *Vanda* (syn. *Neofinetia*) *falcata* is probably the most cold tolerant vandaceous orchid accepting of temperatures in the lower 40's. Lower temperatures may not kill them, but if exposed to too low temperatures, the vandaceous orchids will start dropping leaves giving the plants an unappealing palm tree appearance.



The spring blooming phalaenopsis are getting ready to put on their show, blooming for 3 months or longer, before you cut the stems and repot in June.



The fragrant summer blooming phalaenopsis should be repotted now, if they need to be, so they will reestablish before their blooming season begins.

In February, we can hope that Punxsutawney Phil will not see his shadow, gifting us with an early spring. New root and vegetative growth will begin necessitating more food and water to our plants. The repotting marathon will begin, so all our overgrown plants will be in new containers by June, ahead of the summer heat and humidity. For now, enjoy all the winter blooms rewarding us for last year's labors... We will be back at it again soon!