



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Rebasketing Stanhopeas

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

When you first start growing orchids, you scoff at the idea of growing one that blooms for only 2 or 3 days at a time. That reticence flies out the window once you see a Stanhopea in bloom. Stanhopeas are generally grown in baskets with wide openings to allow the ephemeral flowers to emerge from the bottom or side of the basket. Squat vanda baskets and lined wire baskets are often used with a variety of mixes including sphagnum, bark or custom blends. Here are some thoughts on how to basket your stanhopeas.



1. *Stanhopea inodora* with beautiful and fragrant flowers emerging from the sides of the basket.

Timing of Rebasketing. As with most orchids, a very good time to repot is right before new roots start to grow, which generally happens after the new growths have begun in early spring. If you miss this window of opportunity, wait until early to mid-fall after stanhopeas are done blooming to avoid the potential for damaging a developing inflorescence.

Potting Mix. The potting mix should allow for consistent moisture levels as well as very fast drainage, which sounds like a contradiction of terms. Of course your ideal potting mix is largely dependent on your watering habits. In his book *The Astonishing Stanhopeas*, Aussie Barney Greer suggests it doesn't matter two hoots what mix you use. He talks of one grower who used nothing but old horse manure with the added benefit that the grower never needed to fertilize. As a general rule, a fairly shallow bed of potting media is



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preferable so the flower doesn't have to travel too far to emerge from the base of the basket.

The Basket. The wider the slats in the basket, the better because wide open spaces increase the odds that your flower will find its way out of the basket. Some of the wooden slatted baskets can be problematic because the emerging bud will simply stop growing if its growth is impeded by a wooden slat. Of course, the more wide open the basket, the more likely a basket liner may have to be used, particularly if potting in a bark based mix.

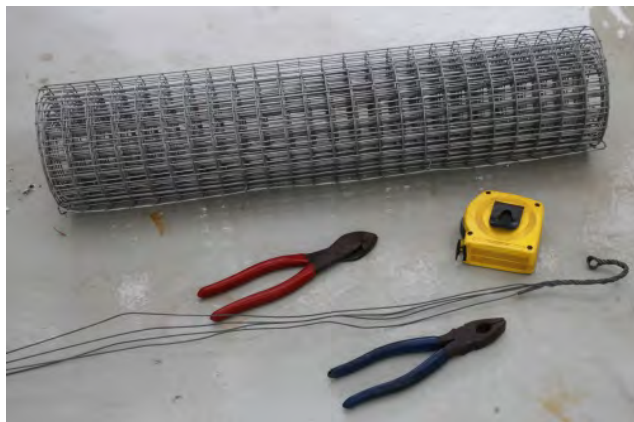
Lining the Basket. The basket can be lined with anything that will hold the potting medium in place without being so dense a barrier that the flower can't peak through. Some alternatives include several layers of newspaper, moss, coconut fiber and preformed coco fiber liners, which are convenient but don't forget to remove that annoying plastic layer from between the bottom layers of the liner or you'll never see any blooms.



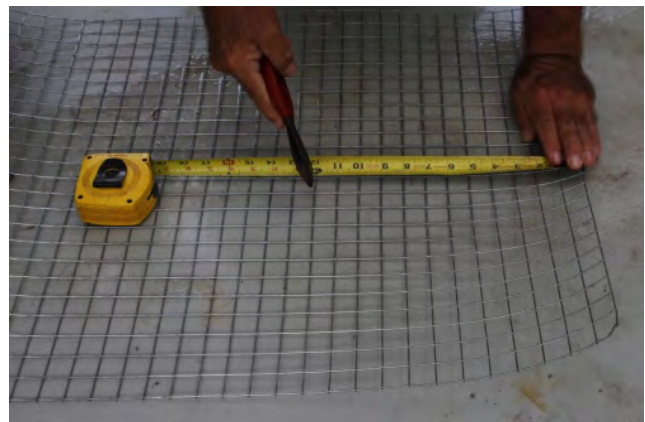
2. *Stanhopea Assidensis* a year after placement in the wire basket.

Jill Godfrey, an American Orchid Society judge from Central Florida, talked to our orchid society about growing stanhopeas. Jill builds her own wire baskets using hardware cloth and uses New Zealand long fibered sphagnum moss around the roots. Jill gave a hands on demonstration on her rebasketing technique. We adapted her technique with some modifications for our growing conditions.

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3. The materials clockwise from top, hardware cloth with 1" spacing, tape measure, wire hanger, lineman's pliers and nippers.



4. Measure twice and cut once! Decide what size basket you need to house your plant.



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5. Snip away, use nippers to cut flush along the edge of the wire.



6. Remove the extra wire using snips to prevent blood loss later. That protruding wire catches on everything.



7. Bend each end of the basket, wires will be attached later.



8. Voilà, your basket is reporting for duty.



9. Add a thin layer of wet sphagnum moss.



10. Place your Stanhopea on top of the moss.



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11. Add a little sphagnum around the roots.



12. Cover the edges with green tree moss.



13. Secure the plant in place with wire



14. A good watering and wait for the roots to reestablish.



15. A happy Stanhopea blooming in one of Joanna Shaw's specially designed Stanhopea baskets.

Of course, if you really want to go uptown, put them in one of Joanna Shaw's Stanhopea baskets. Joanna of Venice, Florida is an accomplished orchid grower who started making slatted clay pots for her cattleyas. She's a "form follows function" potter. Bulbophyllum growers wanted a shallow slatted basket, stanhopea growers wanted a deeper basket with wider slats, phalaenopsis growers wanted a slatted pot that would allow for the drooping habit of the violacea, bellina and gigantea type phalaenopsis, and well, you get the picture. Joanna's Stanhopea baskets are great for growing the plant, and create an extra showy display when your orchids are ready to bloom.



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Citations and Additional Reading:

Kraus, L. 1984. The Culture of Stanhopeas – “Confessions of an Unrequited Love”. *AOS Bulletin* 53(4). 358-366.

Greer, Barney. 1998. *The Astonishing Stanhopeas*. Collaroy Beach NSW 2097, Australia.

Lauri, Robert. Stanhopea Culture Blogspot, <http://stanhopeaculture.blogspot.com/>