



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Wire Products

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@gmail.com

A well-stocked potting shed has a wide variety of wire products that are used for securing, hanging and staking orchids. Here are some traditional wire gadgets and gizmos you may find handy in your growing area, and some tricks for using them.

Rhizome Clips. New orchid growers are taught how important it is to secure a plant in place after repotting so that the plant will not be wobbly in the pot. This allows the new roots to grow to reestablish the plant without worry that the roots will be damaged by the plant moving in the wind. There are different styles of rhizome clips, some with a smooth wide curve designed for the wider rim of clay pots and others with a tight circle that fits over the narrow lip of a plastic pot. You will also see some that try to split the difference so they can be used on either a clay or plastic pot. These look like a clay pot rhizome clip but the outside bottom edge is kinked inward. These do not work that well on either type pot. You either have to try to straighten the kink for them to work well on clay pots or tighten the kink to make them work well on plastic pots. The clips are offered in different sizes and it is good to have a full range matching the pot sizes you typically use.



1. Rhizome clips for plastic pots on the top and clay pots in the middle. If you end up with the rhizome clips like those on the bottom, you will have to do some manipulation to make them work; either straighten the kink for clay pots or tighten the kink for plastic pots.



2. Sometimes you have to insert two clips at an angle to each other to hold the plant firmly in place. Do not be afraid that you may damage the plant by pushing the anchoring clip too hard over the rhizome, it is far worse for the roots to be damaged by wobbling in the pot.

The rhizome clip should be pushed down as far as it will go over the lip of the container so the plant is totally immobilized. Sometimes you may have to adjust the angle of the wire to accommodate the pot or rhizome shape. When you are done, you should pick up the pot and give it a gently shake. If the plant is wobbly, you will have to start over or place a second clip at an angle to the first until you have the plant secure. When repotting, drop the used rhizome clip in a container so you can heat sterilize it prior to reuse.

Rhizome clips do not work well with baskets. You can run a straight wire or bamboo stake through one of the slats, up over the rhizome, and then down through another slat, and depending on the plant you may have to do this from two dimensions. Do not forget to cut off the stake flush with the basket's edge to avoid walking into it and poking out your eye.



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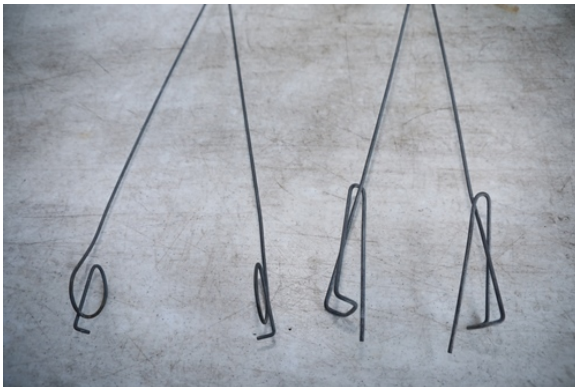
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For plants without rhizomes, you may have to get creative. For phalaenopsis, you can build a tenting structure à la Rube Goldberg if the root system is not extensive enough to hold the plant in place. Angle some short stakes tied together with wire on either side of the plant for a few weeks until the roots reestablish. For vandas in wooden baskets, a small hole can be drilled through a bottom slat and straight wire inserted to tie to the vanda stem and hold it in place.

Pot Hangers. There are single and double wire pot hangers, made for either clay or plastic pots, offered in a variety of shank lengths. Single wire pot hangers work well for smaller pots, particularly if they are hanging off the edge of a bench or from a fence wire structure. You can stabilize pots and keep them from twisting in the wind by using two single wire hangers side by side. If hung from a pole or other horizontal structure, the larger pots with longer shanks tend to hang at an angle relative to the vertical as the pot seeks out its center of gravity. This angled presentation works well with a pendent dendrobium where the flowers will still display well or a phalaenopsis that will readily shed water from its crown.



3. Double wire hanger for plastic pots on the left and clay pots on the right. The tension needs to be adjusted on the clay pot hanger. Wiggle the wire that fits inside the pot back and forth while pushing it toward the outside wire.



4. Single wire hangers are good for small pots and pots hanging against a vertical surface, but larger pots tend to hang at an angle to the vertical. This works well for some pendulous orchids and phals, others not so much.

Double wire hangers hung from an overhead structure tend to allow the plant to grow more uniformly around the pot. The hangers for plastic pots have a circular structure that tightly fits over the narrow rim. Orchid grower Keith Davis has a great suggestion for using these hangers in his “Tips and Tricks for Better Growing” presentation to Orchid Societies. To ensure the plastic wire will not slip off the pot, he uses a torch to heat the elbow of the hanger enough so that it will melt the plastic when pushed through, and then cools it with water. The circular wire holder can be squeezed together with pliers if needed.



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5. Using two single wire hangers side by side helps plants not twist in the wind, while hanging from a vertical wire structure.



6. Add a second wire hanger for stability when hanging larger and heavier pots. The extra strength helps keep them from dropping.

Clay pot double wire hangers have a different structure for holding the wider clay rim. Sometimes the tension in these hangers has to be adjusted to ensure a tight fit. Another tip from Keith, push the tension arm in while pushing it from side to side at the same time. For very heavy or large pots, you can use two hangers to share the work of holding the pot.

Wire Halos. Wire halos are handy to help contain a plant after repotting, although they can cause leaf damage from heat and abrasion and they are unattractive in pictures. They come in a variety of diameters and shank heights.

Wire Baskets. Wire baskets are not the most attractive baskets in the world but they are sturdier than plastic. You can drop an overgrown pot into a basket and delay the inevitable repotting for several years. You can also mount orchids on an upside down basket. You can cover it with sheet moss, coconut fiber or a premade coconut fiber liner (get them unwaxed, and do not forget to remove that pesky plastic layer in the middle layer).



7. It's not the most attractive presentation, but you can drop overgrown clay pots into a wire basket. This seemed preferable to disrupting the *Angraecum* roots.



8. You can mount bulbos on an inverted wire basket topped with a coco fiber liner; just remember to remove that plastic inner liner from the coco.



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Wire Gauges. For some galvanized steel wire products, you should know the thickness of the wire to make to be sure it is strong enough to perform its function without bending or straightening. The thickness of wire is measured by gauge, where somewhat counterintuitively, the thicker the wire, the lower the gauge. This system was developed in the 1800's reputedly to indicate the number of times the wire had been drawn through the draw plate, so wire would be thinner after the tenth draw (gauge 10) than the ninth draw (gauge 9).

Thickness of Various Wire Gauges		
Wire Gauge	Diameter (in)	Diameter (mm)
8	0.17	4.2
10	0.13	3.4
12	0.11	2.8
14	0.08	2.1
16	0.07	1.7

Based on the Birmingham Wire Gauge system, sometimes called the Stubs Iron Wire Gauge system

16 Gauge Wire is used typically on the three and four wire basket hangers, sometimes a slightly thicker 14 gauge wire is used. The wire is thin, easily bent and cut, and is strong enough for most hanging baskets by virtue of the fact that three or four strands together do the work of holding the baskets. These come in various lengths so you can match the plant height to the wire length.



9. If you have an overhead structure, you can hang S hooks for tall spikes.

12 Gauge Wire is a little thicker and stronger. This thickness wire is great for staking orchids. This wire thickness is used in double wire hangers for tree fern pots because it can be pushed through the tree fern pot more easily than the thin 16 gauge wire. It is a little thin for making S hooks unless used for something light. One great source of straight wire in this thickness is the drop ceiling section of a building material supply store. Be careful with the rolled wire because it is not easy to straighten out.

10 Gauge Wire is the gold standard for most orchid applications because it is stronger and thicker wire. It is a good thickness for most S hooks because it is strong enough to hold all but the heaviest pots. For these, you may have to use two S hooks together or find a source of thicker, sturdier wire. S hooks in all different lengths are great to keep on hand. In addition to the obvious uses,



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they can be used for staking tall or long flower spikes, if you have an overhead source from which to hang them.

8 or 9 Gauge Wire is thick and strong, but more difficult to bend or cut and more difficult to find. Straight wire is available at a few orchid supply vendors or it can be ordered online.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. These pictures show some different wire products and how they can be used with your orchids. You are limited only by your imagination. Be sure to share your new tricks with your orchid buddies!