

Orchidizing

by Frank Fordyce & Bob Adams

THE "ALL-AMERICAN ORCHID"

For some time I have been wondering if it would be possible to select "The All American Orchid" flower of the year. One of the greatest boons to the rose industry has been the publicity of their "All American Rose" choice of the year. While it is true that roses have a far greater following than orchids, I believe a considerable amount of publicity may be gained for the industry and the hobby by the awarding of the "All American Orchid" of the year.

Naturally, the major problem would be the actual selection of a specific genus such as the commercially popular *Cattleya* and/or *Cymbidium*, and the physical viewing and judging of the blooms submitted. Because we have blooms to be judged the year around, the judging itself would have to come under the jurisdiction of one of the existing judging systems.

A committee could be selected by the judging chairman to review all awards given to the specific genus during the year, and the "All American" winner could be selected by the highest points scored by an individual plant.

News releases with accompanying photographs could then be released to the national wire services or local newspapers, thereby gaining a tremendous amount of publicity.

LEAF FALL—WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Yellowing and falling of leaves is often thought to be a sign of unhealthiness in a plant. This is possible, but it may be due to natural leaf fall. To illustrate: Natural ripening and shedding of foliage is a slow process, taking place at any time of the year, but is more pronounced during spring and especially fall. Leaves are usually shed from bulbs that are three to four years old, depending upon the type. Rarely are leaves shed from more than one back-bulb at a time, or more than one bulb per year. This is normal for most *cattleyas* and *cymbidiums*.

Leaves may also yellow and drop because of poor care or culture, primarily over-watering or under-watering. The symptoms are similar. Falling leaves along with shriveled bulbs and small stunted growths would indicate these conditions. How does one check to see if he has been over-watering or under-watering? Take the plants out of their pots and look at the roots. In cases of over-watering, the roots will be soft, brown, soggy and decayed. The outer layer of the root will strip easily from the center core. Dryness, or under-watering is far less serious than over-watering. When dry plants are taken from their pots, their roots are alive, white and firm. These plants may have lost some foliage, but by *carefully* watering a little more, they will soon be "back on their feet."

If the plants have lost their roots due to a soggy condition, it may be some time before they are thriving again.

They must be completely repotted, into smaller pots, with new potting media, making sure that all old dead roots have been cut away. With newly potted plants, try to increase humidity to prevent any more leaf loss.

If bulbs shrivel and several leaves yellow and fall on the same plant—watch out. Unpot and treat accordingly.

PH—WHAT IS IT?

The symbol PH stands for potential hydrogen. Actually this refers to how strongly acid or alkaline water or soil may be. The PH scale runs from 1 to 14. Seven is considered the middle or neutral. Below 7 is acid, above 7 is alkaline. The further from 7, the stronger acid or alkaline the solution.

Orchids seem to prefer slightly acid soils; on the PH scale from 5 to 7. There are several kits on the market for testing soils and water, but one of the simplest and least expensive is litmus paper. Litmus paper when dipped in liquid will change color, the color is then matched to a color scale to give you a PH scale reading. You can find litmus paper at most drug stores with complete instructions.

Once in awhile we come upon a *laeliocattleya* that refuses to initiate buds. We hang the pot close to the glass giving the plant much more light than normal. After growths mature give the plant 55 deg. cool nights until the buds can be seen in the sheath.

Cattleya gigas, or its primary hybrids, often produce leads from every eye after blooming, but do not produce flowers. This is largely due to a temperature problem. Night temperatures above 60 deg. often produce this extra growth. In the future observe . . . warm summers equal extra growth, and cool summers, no extra growth. When flowering growths are developing run as close to 55 deg. night temperature as possible.

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