



# Central Vancouver Island Orchid Society Newsletter May 2015

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A wonderful Dracula photographed “in situ” in the greenhouse of Mario Ferrusi, Photo by Bryan

Meetings are held September through June on a Saturday at the Harewood Activity Centre, 195 Fourth Street, Nanaimo, in the hall on the second floor, doors open at 11:30, with the business meeting starting at 12:00 noon.

**Coming Meeting Dates:** 2015: May 23, June 20.

## **Program for for May 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Epidendrums**

with Patricia Harding

## **Coming Events:**

**May Meeting will be a silent auction of plants (though we won't turn away food)**

June will have our AGM and elections (please come still!)

Thank goodness there are no shows until fall!

**Editorial:** Well, another year wrapping up, only two meetings left before our summer break! The weather sure has been warm in Victoria, I can only assume everyone else has unusually warm weather. Everything in my garden seems to be confused as to what month it is, the peonies were almost a month late, as I think they were waiting for winter to come still, the roses seem two or three weeks early, and my Rhodo that blooms faithfully the second week of June is starting already! I hope all of your orchids are doing well, and those of you whom garden are having a great start to the season. **B**

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CVIOS General Meeting – April 25, 2015

Bryan called the meeting to order at 12:00 noon with 24 members and 5 visitors present.

Bev moved acceptance of the minutes of March 21 be accepted as published, Connie seconded the motion and motion carried. Dora asked if we could change the format of the minutes in the newsletter and Bryan and Laurie said we would work on that.

Treasurers Report: Joann gave us a summary of our balances of the general account, AOS account and Harry's memorial fund to the end of March. She indicated that we had raised \$100 at our bag draw in February. Mike moved acceptance of Joann's report, Dusty seconded the motion and motion carried.

Correspondence: Included the March and April AOS Bulletins and the Lee Valley annual and garden catalogues.

Refreshments: Sandra indicated we need more people to add their names to the list for June. THANK YOU to Maureen, Joann, Mike and Julia for bring goodies this month and REMINDERS to Laurie, Julia, Keith and Connie for May.

Nancy reminded us that today is the deadline for H&R preorders.

Upcoming programs include: Alexey (Growing orchids out of the Box) - Today  
Patricia Harding (Epidendrums) - May  
Roy from H&R (Dendrobiums) – June

Our Show: Angie indicated our attendance was up this year and the Vendors did well. Our prize draw raised \$123. We discussed changing the date of our show. Mike moved that we change the date to early fall, either October 1,2 &3 or October 8,9 & 10. Bryan seconded the motion and motion carried. Mike also moved that we have our next show this October rather than waiting to October 2016. Laurie seconded the motion and motion carried.

Mike commented on the quality of members orchids at the show.

Dora pointed out that more volunteers are still needed and that the show chair needs a co-chair for upcoming shows.

We talked about having effective and manageable signage to place on road ways during the show. This was particularly well done in Victoria this year.

Reminders: Elections are coming in June. Please consider letting your name stand for one of the positions on the executive.

Silent Auction – We will be having a Plant & Other Items Silent Auction at our May meeting.

Memberships: Dora will give us names etc of new members to add to our membership list.

Don indicated that our web site will have a new domain name (CVIOS.org) but there will be some transition time before this happens.

We discussed making room for table cloths used to skirt show tables and reorganizing our storage room to eliminate some of the items that are not used that are currently stored there or at others at members homes. We will organize a work crew to clean up our storage space.

Our meeting adjourned at 12:30

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"Tip of The Month" Will be "Nutrition, Make it Easy: Calcium" with Alexey

The Dr is out, The orchid Dr will not be available this meeting

Following up our previous meeting, here are the links which have been asked to be published:

Culture of Nobile type Dendrobiums can be found at "Caring" pages of Yamamoto Dendrobiums website:<http://www.yamamotodendrobiums.com> Both, General Care and Hints sections of Caring are very useful.

Catasetianae culture can be found at the page "Orchid Culture" of Fred Clarke Sunset Valley Orchids Inc. website:<http://www.sunsetvalleyorchids.com>

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**Attention society members!**

**I have received the below email from the daughter of one of our members that has passed, I have told her that I was sure people would be willing to help her honor her father's memory, please email me if you think you can help, I know it is hard to know what will be open then but anything will help.**

To whom it may concern,

Hello my name is Sarah Morris, my Dad, Geoff Banham was an active member of the Nanaimo Orchid Society until his death in September 2012. My dad was the most kind, caring, and compassionate man and I miss him very much.

I am getting married in June and to honour my Dad's memory, I want Orchids in my bouquet and also a few Orchids on my table for my reception. I was wondering if someone can either donate some orchids for my wedding or if I can buy some orchids at cost.

I would really appreciate if you could help me with my request.

Thank you

Sarah Morris

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## HINTS ON THE WATERING OF ORCHIDS

By Burton M. Forman & Thomas P. Krumpe, Jr.

**Introduction:** *In the world of orchid growing - from decrepit growers such as ourselves, down to the novice- one burning question seems to predominate. HOW OFTEN ARE MY ORCHIDS TO BE WATERED? Even learned orchid judges of many years standing have asked this question. One orchid judge of our acquaintance summed up his despair by saying, "I'll never get this watering down pat." Despair not, despair not, help is on the way. We feel that when you have finished reading this article your questions will be answered in full! Caution: Everything you read should be subjected to your own experiments. Through the years we have come across a great deal of misinformation from books and articles about the growing of orchids. Without doubt their authors were completely sincere in their*

*presentation, as are we, but the possibility remains of error. Sit back in your chair, relax, imbibe if you must, and for a little while follow us into the world of good orchid watering.*

Before answering the 'burning question' let us start with a hypothetical situation. You have sent for a large shipment of orchids from a nursery, which notifies you that the orchids are now on their way, and that you may expect to receive them in a few days. Your order has included plants of Cattleyas, Epidendrums, etc. However, before reaching you, whether because of a mix up of your order, poor handling on the part of the packers, or ruinous damage on the part of the carrier, every label has been lost, damaged, or obliterated to the point where it is illegible. You are now faced with trying to grow a wide assortment of plants that are nameless, and like most objects that are unnamed, frightening. Arguing the point with the nursery would be too time consuming, and anyhow you have decided to accept the challenge of growing these monsters with no information as to the type, culture, nor origin. Let us begin.

Epiphytic orchids (and in this article we will deal only with epiphytes) are best grown when grouped together in the greenhouse according to leaf structure and pot size, rather than *just* pot size. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, those with similar leaves seem to have similar light requirements, and secondly; plants with similar leaves also tend to have similar watering demands. Two factors predominate in orchid leaves, e.g., texture and shape. We are faced with growing these various strangers in one greenhouse. In a wide assortment of epiphytic species or Cattleya hybrids perfection for all cannot be achieved in one greenhouse, the perfectionist necessitating different greenhouses to grow many species. Most of us can neither afford many greenhouses nor spare the space for such a venture, and must grow our plants in one greenhouse. Hence, separating the plants as to leaf type is our first step. Reading figuratively from left to right our first type is the fine-textured, ovate leaf illustrated by such plants as Stanhopeas, Lycastes, Anguloas, etc. On the extreme right we have such leaf structures as *Vanda teres*, *Aerides mitratum*, *Dendrobium linguiforme*, and *Scuticaria steelii*. A quick examination of all your plants will quickly reveal their relationship of leaf structure to the above extreme types, and they can then be segregated. (No riots here). Further segregation according to pot size is then employed. The Stanhopea type of leaf calls for shade, and again moving from the figurative left to right, the succulent and terete type leaves call for brilliant sunshine. Since most growers are Cattleya fiends, the best procedure is to modify the light and shading to suit Cattleyas, and then place the others as to their light requirements judging from the leaf type in relationship to the ubiquitous Cattleyas. Other more eclectic growers will want to adjust their shading for their most numerous type such as Masdevallias or Catasetums, and working to the left and right for the other plants from there. To repeat, growing a large assortment of plants in one greenhouse will evidently give less than perfect results for all genera. Do not expect to grow all plants to perfection, but strive for the ultimate in your greenhouse and under your conditions.

There is, as usual, a fly in the ointment, an exception to the rule, and a square peg for the round hole - Phalaenopsis. According to the foregoing rules a Phalaenopsis should fit somewhat to the shady side of a Cattleya - which it does not - feeling more at home with trolls and moles! Fortunately, the light requirement for a Phalaenopsis is so well known that we can afford to ship it immediately to the shadier part of the greenhouse and feel secure. There must be, of course, other exceptions which do not come so readily to mind. However, after burning the leaves of the exceptions, simply 'cuss' us out roundly and place them in a shadier position

If you have arranged your plants as suggested they are now lined up for two purposes - light factors and watering factors. Some people fail to realize that there is a correlation between the shape of the leaf and the need for water. In general, plants with leaves having large surfaces need less light and more water for the reason that the large surface collects more light and evaporates more water.

Recently in moving our collection from one city to another a leaf of *Scuticaria steelii* broke off from the main plant. This terete, quill-like leaf was placed next to the plant and observed. It was many weeks before the detached leaf started showing signs of wrinkling, and many, many more weeks before necrosis set in. Apparently, it would be difficult to underwater a plant with terete leaves.

Happily, oh happily, there is a definite, irrevocable, and immutable law which nature has set up for the watering of epiphytic orchids, which when understood resolves the problem once and for all. What follows has been known to astute growers all along, but none of them in any of their books or articles seem to be able to verbalize their information so that it is available to the home grower. Herewith we attempt to verbalize the information.

It is spring. The birds are on the wing, the aphids are on the roses, and the last growth is going over the edge of the pot. There is on every epiphytic orchid what amounts to a neon sign announcing water needs. Upon the appearance of new roots at first all that can be seen is the root tip which pushes forward. After a short time, depending on the plant involved, the white velamen appears. The length of the green root tip varies from plant to plant. Before the velamen covering appears, most orchid root tips will have elongated between one half to one inch. You are now looking at the most important single factor in the watering dilemma. Most authors state that healthy roots mean a healthy plant. Of course they do, but how does one maintain healthy roots. *The job of the grower is to keep that root tip growing so that it remains at the same size in relation to the distance at which the white velamen follows.*

Because the entire process of watering orchids is contained in that one sentence we will repeat it word for word so that it will not escape attention: *"The job of the grower is to keep that root tip growing so that it remains at the same size in relation to the distance at which the white velamen follows."* Let us play around theoretically with this idea to observe reactions. Let us say the root tips are now touching the potting medium. We water today. For the purposes of experimentation we water again the next day, and throwing all caution to the winds, we water again on the third day. Remembering the idea that roots are reaching out for water we can readily guess what will happen when this much water is applied. The root tips, having found water, will slow their growth. If water is applied constantly the root tip growth stops completely, and the white velamen that follows catches up with the tip. This, of course, is an extreme case. However, in the average greenhouse, something akin to this is going on. We had occasion recently to check a plant table at an orchid meeting to find that of the one hundred or more plants displayed, only three of four plants showed active growing root tips. Surely the other plants were in bloom, but we wonder how many more blooms each plant could have achieved with healthy roots! We can now formulate our first thought on watering. *When the roots are actively growing with healthy root tips the plant is in a condition to receive water.*

The next question is how often? The neon light referred to earlier is the distance of the root tip from the white velamen that follows. Generally when the new roots appear the distance of the tip from the velamen is optimum. The grower here must use his eagle eye, look at these roots or actually measure the distance with a ruler. *In a Cattleya the optimum root tip distance is generally between one half and one inch!* Once the optimum for any plant is known this is the measurement to strive for during the entire active life of those roots. From this point on each plant will tell us how much water is needed. If too much water is applied to a plant, one can watch the green tip rapidly being overwhelmed by the white velamen. Those plants with healthy roots, and only those, will produce the maximum number of blooms with quality texture. All the other plants may bloom, but both the number and quality of the blooms will be deficient. To repeat both postulates together, watering is to be done only when the root tip is actively growing and maintaining the green section at its optimum length.

Should the velamen be observed to be overtaking root tip start spacing the watering frequency so that if in the summer you water every four days extend it to five days or six days. It will take some

time before the root tip has regrown to its original size so don't panic after a week or two, but stay with your new watering schedule before extending the 'dry' periods. Our method has been to stop watering altogether until new root tips appear, and then space the watering days farther apart until we achieve the required balance between watering and keeping the root tips at their maximum.

The idea that one can feel the potting medium and determine watering needs is fictional. You will find that in the height of the growing season some plants will need water even when the compost is wet. For a short while during the height of the growing season you will notice plants that have good long growing tips, but the pseudo bulb from which the new growth is coming will show signs of wrinkling. If this happens, even if the compost is wet, water, and you will be surprised to find the last pseudobulb filled out again the next day.

A *Dendrobium nobile* and a *Brassia antherotes*. Both of these plants are being grown by us on tree fern plaques. Both have long green root tips, and both show signs of shrivelling long, long, long before the compost has dried. In this case, to feel the growing medium for water content is useless.

It should now be obvious why the plants are to be segregated according to leaf type. Apparently, regardless of the genera, leaf type determines the amount of water needed. Watch out for the exceptions. We can now have *Vanda teres*, *Dendrobium linguiforme*, and *Brassavola nodosa* growing in one spot and be assured that the watering and light requirements are similar.

One question comes to mind immediately. How can one watch the root tips if a plant is grown in a pot. The answer lies in the aforementioned segregation. Surely in a group of several orchids of the same leaf type in the same size pots several will have some roots growing on the surface. Use these plants in front as key plants. If you have say ten plants of the same leaf type growing in six inch pots, and you are using one plant with exposed roots as your key plant, should the root tip on the key plant diminish in size you can rest assured that is exactly what is happening in the other pots. Whether the root is inside or outside of the pot makes no difference. A plant that is receiving too much water will stop extending its roots both inside and outside of the pot even though the visible roots are outside and dry out much faster. Individual plants will exhibit roots with different root tip lengths. Lateral roots, at first, tend to have shorter growing tips than roots issuing from the most recent pseudo bulb. However, observing the root tips from a new pseudo bulb will give you the correct idea on healthy tips, and the others although smaller will have the same shape. Don't depend on only one root. The root tips will vary in size, some just starting out, and others slowing down somewhat. However, all should have good growing tips, and just so long as they do, water can be applied with assurance.

Winter watering is a subject that has been fairly well covered elsewhere. Suffice to say if you have understood the function of the root tip you will also understand winter watering. As the root tip begins to diminish so does the need for water, and after the root tip has been 'overcome' by the velamen it is best to spray and to water only when shrivelling of the backbulbs occurs.

What about underwatering. It is interesting to note that overwatering receives a good deal of publicity, but underwatering is rarely mentioned. In our travels from greenhouse to greenhouse giving advice and care the amount of underwatering we encounter is surprising. Here too, fortunately, we have definite signs of this. When a plant is consistently underwatered it shows signs of shrivelling. We all know this, but too few of us apply the knowledge. The pseudo bulb to be watched is the first one behind the new growing pseudobulb. The older pseudobulbs shrivel to some extent regardless of the care given. When shivelling is noticed on the pseudo bulb directly behind the leading growth in an otherwise healthy plant underwatering is the cause, and the watering period should be stepped up slowly.

It's as simple as that. *Keep the root tips growing while not allowing the pseudo bulbs to shrivel!* You now know how to water orchids.

Two factors have not been mentioned. Temperature and humidity. In general, most home

growers have only one greenhouse with one temperature. We know of no quick way to determine the optimum temperature for any epiphytic orchid except to check its native habitat. In our mythical shipment of orchids this factor is not available from the name of the plant. If you know the name of any plant, of course, check for specific information. With an unknown orchid it is always best to start at an intermediate temperature. Should the plant show signs of improper growth it is necessary then to experiment with heat requirements until a better situation is achieved. Humidity is in the same category. It would be very nice if we could vary the humidity to meet the needs of each individual plant, but since this is not within the power of the home grower little need be said except to keep it up in the sixties and seventies if possible.

What then of good culture? Must we wait to see the blooms to know that our culture has been effective, or is there a way of knowing beforehand that all is well? Yes, yes, oh yes, there is a way! This is another observation of which we find no mention in any book on orchids. **WHEN A PLANT IS BEING GROWN TO ITS OPTIMUM CAPACITY ALL NEW LEAVES WILL BE WIDE OPEN UPON APPEARANCE.** That is, the moment a new leaf appears, whether it be Cattleya, Vanda, Odontoglossum, or even those with semi-terete leaves, it should be open and unfolded. If it is closed and fails to open even at the very outset there is something amiss with the culture of the plant. We have seen too many plants on which the new leaves open only when pushed open by the emerging flower sheath or a second leaf in multi-leaved plants. Warning: Do not run into your greenhouse to check your plants to find this condition. Some new leaves may exhibit this quality, and some may not. It is utterly impossible in a home greenhouse to achieve the ultimate results for all plants. Be satisfied if you find open leaves on the majority of your plants. The others will bloom too, perhaps not so profusely, but bloom they will.

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Orchid Digest, December 1968

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## Ten Ways to Get More Pleasure From Your Orchids

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By Ernest Hetherington

Whether a person has a large collection, a small one, or has been growing for months or years, there are certain rules which, if followed, will lead to more successful and profitable orchid growing. These "dos" and "don'ts" are very simple. The novice should observe them; the commercial grower must observe them, or he does not run a successful business.

The first of these is: **LEARN BASIC GOOD CULTURE.** An average orchid, well grown, will give you better flowers than a fine variety poorly grown. Another way of putting this is, when the breeding is set, either good or bad, for a particular plant, it cannot be changed. The only way you can improve the situation is to do a good job of growing. If you have a greenhouse, see that the greenhouse has proper controls and conditions. Learn how to pot a plant. Learn how to feed and water and adjust the light. Don't be continually experimenting with new mixes, new feeding procedures, and all sorts of techniques until you have learned the basics. Get acquainted with an advanced amateur in whom you have confidence, or if you live near a commercial establishment, find out how they are doing it. Listen to them and follow their advice. After you have learned the rudiments of good culture then you can start experimenting and develop a mix or other cultural technique which will startle the orchid world.

The second rule is: **GET PROPER GROWING FACILITIES.** If you raise Cattleyas, get a

greenhouse with proper controls. Don't try raising them under adverse conditions unless it is absolutely necessary. There are many people who raise orchids in the home and even in the basement with lights. This is much more difficult than if they are grown in a greenhouse with controlled growing conditions. I believe it is "getting the cart before the horse" if you spend money on orchid plants before you have proper facilities. This may sound like heresy against commercial orchid growers, and I am one myself, but more plants will follow if you are successful with your first ones.

Rule three: **WATCH FOR "CREEPING OBSOLESCENCE"**. An orchid collection is an ever changing, growing thing. Your interests do not remain the same. Often what you liked yesterday is not your favorite today. As you build up your collection you will find your tastes becoming more refined and selective. Realize that you have just so much space, time, energy, and money to spend on your collection. Get the most satisfaction and pleasure from them. If you have plants which you know are diseased or not doing well, get rid of them. Good orchid plants are no longer expensive. Make sure that every plant in your collection produces well and gives you the blooms you desire. If you have a collection of Cattleyas, count the growths on a mature plant. How many out of this total have flowered? Most of them should have; otherwise that plant is a nonblooming boarder. Do you have a plant, which won't flower even though you are determined to make it do so? After you have given it a fair trial under varying conditions and it still doesn't flower, get rid of it. There are other plants, which will produce well waiting to take its place. Do you have a plant which flowers well for you but which has rather inferior flowers? You have divided it and you now have a dozen plants of the same variety? Give some away to someone who is starting, or give some as gift plants. Make room for better quality. Do you have some plants which you got in a community pot and which are not doing as well as others from the same pot which are vigorous? Have you repotted them several times perhaps in different potting materials? Chances are they are aneuploids (runts) and never will do well. Throw them out and make room for the ones which came from the same community pot and which are growing well. Keep upgrading your collection and you will get more pleasure from it.

The fourth rule is: **LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT DISEASE IDENTIFICATION AND PEST CONTROL. LEARN ASEPTIC TECHNIQUE**. I cannot tell you here how to identify virus and other diseases in orchids. There are some excellent articles in past issues of the *Digest* on this subject. I can suggest, however, that you realize that orchids do have certain diseases and they can be spread. What a shame to have a beautiful and perhaps expensive variety become infected with a disease merely because you did not learn a little about its prevention. Learn about a few of the orchid pests also. Common orchid scale is so easily identified, controlled, and eradicated with modern insecticides. If you raise Cymbidiums, learn what red spider looks like and be on the alert for it. How often beautiful blooms are eaten up by slugs and snails, and yet we have so many very effective baits available. As for aseptic technique, learn not to cut up your plants before you have sterilized your cutting tools. Don't cut your flowers until you have flamed your knife. A simple propane torch in your greenhouse or nearby is so effective and such a good investment. Be sure your plants are not crowded and that you have good air circulation.

Here is rule five: **BUY GOOD STOCK**. You are being "penny-wise and pound-foolish" if you try to fill up your greenhouse, lathhouse or wherever you grow your orchids, very quickly and at minimum cost. Remember, you get what you pay for. Good orchids are no longer expensive. There are so many reputable growers who have seedlings of excellent breeding as well as flowering size plants and small divisions which cost very little. If you have a number of inexpensive plants which you have used in learning how to grow orchids, phase them out by upgrading your collection. Locate a

commercial grower in whom you have confidence and take his advice. Remember, it's his business and he worked hard to gain a reputation. His advice will cost you nothing.

The next rule, number six, is: **LEARN A LITTLE ABOUT ORCHID TAXONOMY AND WATCH YOUR LABELING.** You will get so much more pleasure from your collection if you know a little about orchid names. How are orchids named? How are they registered? Learn what makes an Lc., a Blc., and the various types of Cymbidiums, whatever your preferences might be: Keep your plants well labeled. It is such a sad sight to go into a collection and see the names worn off the tags or the tags themselves completely missing. A plant without identity loses so much of its value.

Rule seven: **BEWARE OF GIFT PLANTS.** This is related to several of the other categories; however, a few words here are of value. I wish to say first that gifts from a knowledgeable amateur are fine, and are good starters. If you are just starting in, take heed of the plant your neighbor gave you which he could not flower himself. Beware of the plant that Aunt Mamie gave you that someone gave her while she was in the hospital. Most plants, which you win at your society's plant drawings are of excellent quality and from reputable growers. However, beware of plants, which are sometimes donated by well meaning persons who have cleaned out their greenhouses for the plant raffle.

And here is the eighth rule: **SPECIALIZE.** Orchidology is a vast and diversified science. There are many fields of endeavor within orchids. The basic rule, of course, is grow what you like; however, you will receive more pleasure from your plants if you go into a certain genus or field of orchidology in greater depth. To illustrate - you may get an immense thrill out of raising seedlings, watching them grow and hoping for a winner. You may be one who gets satisfaction in having nothing but the finest selected varieties or awarded varieties in your collection. You may wish to specialize in one genus such as Cymbidiums, Paphiopedilums, Cattleya hybrids, Phalaenopsis, or some other genus. There are those who have a special fondness for natural species. You may want to fill your whole greenhouse with nothing but species. Well and good if this gives you the most pleasure.

Rule nine: **SELECT A GOOD ORCHID LIBRARY.** You will get pleasure from your orchids in direct relationship to your knowledge of what you are doing. There are so many questions to be answered that a good library is invaluable. You can go as far as you wish here depending on how much of a bibliophile you might be. A few of the basic books might be all that is needed.

And lastly, rule ten: **JOIN YOUR LOCAL ORCHID SOCIETY, AND SUBSCRIBE TO A JOURNAL SUCH AS** The Orchid Digest, The American Orchid Society ORCHIDS is also very worthwhile and comes with the membership. If you are interested in Cymbidiums, the Cymbidium Society with its publication, *The News*, should be a must. When you join your local orchid society you will receive many benefits. If you attend the monthly meetings there is always a lecture of general interest. The personal contacts you make are of great value. By working with others who share your interest you can truly multiply the benefits you get from your orchid collection.

Orchid growing is a hobby, which, literally, can give you great pleasure all of your life. You can surely get the utmost in satisfaction and rewards if you bear in mind even a few of the basic guide rules, which I have outlined.

Orchid Digest, June 1967

The only thing I can add to the above article is:

Number eleven: Join the executive of your local orchid society! Ed.