

La Orquídea Subterránea



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Letter from the Editor

Dear Orchid friends,

Now that fall is over, things are starting to settle down. The summer and early fall were so busy that I didn't have time for some of my fun things, like writing the newsletter. This was a great year for my orchids. They spent the entire summer outside on my back porch. There was plenty of light, warm air, breezes, and it was much easier to water. I actually didn't take my orchids in until the last part of October. They are all now nestled in the sport in the dining room for the winter. Somehow my collection just keeps growing. At last count it was 70.

This year I am supplementing lighting with CFL bulbs which are very cheap to run. I bought one of those 5 arm octopus lamps, plus a grow light and two grow bulbs. So far the weather has been warm so I have not had to supplement the heat as of yet. I have had at least 1 or 2 orchids in bloom since the summer. It is pretty amazing. My tried and true *scarcophilus* has put out its winter spikes and I should have flowers sometime in late January or February. This will be the third winter in a row that it has bloomed for me.

There are two things I'd like to do this winter. One is I want to organize a trip to an orchid greenhouse in Grafton, Ma. My friend Mark Van Dyke owns Mstic Mountain Orchids and his greenhouse is amazing. I just have to help him clean it up a bit before we can go up. Please let me know if you would be interested. There might even be some orchids for sale if I can talk him in to partying with a few.

The other thing is I would like to organize another orchid talk. This would be informal and I would probably host it, but I would like to order another box of orchids, if we can get enough people together. Please email if you are interested. Please feel free to tell your friend and anyone else you know who might be interested in orchids. It would be great to do this in late January. A great way to brighten our winter months.

Warmly,

Tony Lulek

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O Orchid Tree

BELMONT, NC - No glass, tinsel or glitter decorate this tree. Not a star. Not a Santa. Not a single starry light. But colors - pink and purple and yellow and red and white and orange - fill the tree, floor to ceiling 15 feet up. At the moment, Lee Potts is on a ladder, watering the ornaments. They turn out to be 280 orchids in full bloom with a supporting cast of 70 frothy ferns.

Together, they comprise an orchid "tree" -- the centerpiece of holiday decorations in the Visitor Pavilion at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden. Potts is the botanical garden's new orchid curator, a job he came to in October after more than 20 years of experience growing and hybridizing orchids at a Kannapolis greenhouse.

He is armed with a 2-gallon backpack of lukewarm water with a sprayer hose, adjustable, of course. Each pot gets watered individually a couple of times a week. He can tell by



Lee Potts is the orchid curator at Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden. Potts and others have created a 15-foot Christmas tree bedecked with approximately 280 potted orchids and about 70 ferns. The custom-made steel superstructure of the tree comes in three 5-foot levels with 19 circular shelves.

putting his fingers into the pots whether a plant needs water or should wait until tomorrow. But the entire tree gets misted every day to keep up humidity. For the ferns and many of the orchids, it's a misty reminder of their native home in the tropics. Watering, misting and grooming add up to about three hours a day in December, but Potts does not mind the tedium because it keeps the plants in top form. The grooming is necessary because leaves and flowers naturally fade.

The orchid tree is a natural thing for Daniel Stowe to emphasize these days. The new Orchid Conservatory is under construction, destined to open in January 2008. The garden's first orchid tree went up last December -- an artificial tree that the staff hung with potted orchids. It was just a hint of what was to come this year.

The staff knew of sturdy, tiered, cone-shaped, metal frames sometimes used to display poinsettias in large lobbies. One was chosen to form the tall base of the orchid tree, each tier about 1 foot higher. The staff spent two days putting it up. Head Gardener Douglas Ruhren said it was similar to a family putting up a Christmas tree in the living room, with strong debate on the placement of ornaments, in this case all potted. "We'd step back and say, 'You need a little more white here, a little more arching out there.' I was amazed at how well it came together. "What we wanted was the bright, beautiful colors of orchids that will dazzle and show off the diversity of the orchid family."

The idea of putting lights on the orchid tree was discussed but not adopted by the staff, Potts recalls. After all, the garden has 350,000 lights for its holiday display throughout the garden.

For the orchid curator, the tree is a marvelous way to show off the beauty of his favorite plant. He took a job two decades ago in an orchid business in Kannapolis. In the beginning, working in the greenhouse was just a job. He had been mowing grass.

"Initially, I cared nothing for orchids," Potts said. "It was a job to pay my bills. But approximately six months in, I found I was really drawn to the colors, found them really special."

That was the beginning of years of learning about orchids by studying and observing the nature of this vast plant family and hybridizing plants. Today, Potts thinks he is one lucky guy to earn a living doing something he enjoys so much.

Some of the orchids were used on last year's tree and brought into rebloom this month. Others were bought this year and will become part of the garden's permanent collection of orchids. Beyond what is on the tree, more are waiting in the greenhouse as emergency replacements. The Daniel Stowe horticulturists are fortunate in that orchid blooms tend to be long-lasting and unfold over a long stretch of time. Careful watering, misting and grooming are the three things Potts keeps in mind every day as he surveys this amazing assembly of plant life.

4 KEY THING: Lee Potts' advice on orchids.

- **Light.** Know the type of light your orchid requires. For example, moth orchids tend to prosper in morning, eastern light, while dendrobians and oncidiums prefer stronger, western light.

- **Water.** Don't overwater the plants. To test, stick a freshly sharpened pencil into the pot. If it comes up showing evidence of dampness, wait to water and check again the next day.

- **Humidity.** Most houses are too dry for orchids. Raise the humidity by setting plants on a tray of pebbles or gravel with water. Don't let the pot sit in the water.

Grouping humidity loving plants such as orchids and ferns also raises the humidity level for all.

- **Repotting.** Repot in spring to give the plants maximum time to grow new roots that will fill the pot.

Great Orchid Resources

Resource sites

www.gardenweb.com - a great place to post questions and pictures. A lot of help to me in the beginning

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/orchi - A lot of good information about orchids in general. Very detailed, with lots of links.

www.orchidspecies.com - Online listing of over 600 genera.

www.orchidweb.com (don't confuse with orchidweb.org AOS). Good information.

www.google.com and google images: Just typing in orchids and you will find many sites with lots of good information, sometimes a bit overwhelming. If you buy an orchid with no bloom, but you know the name, you can google it in images too see what it looks like.

Orchid Societies

American Orchid Society: www.orchidweb.org - dig around on the site.

Massachusetts Orchid Society: www.massorchid.org - they tend to be a bit lax in updating the site

Royal Horticultural Society: www.rhs.org.uk - amazing amount of information. This is where someone would register a new genus, species, or a hybrid.

Orchid Creative Corner



This is one of series of orchid prints from the first edition of Robert Warner and Thomas Moore's illustrious Orchid Album, Comprising Colored Figures and Descriptions of New, Rare and Beautiful Orchidaceous Plants, London: Published by B.S. Williams, at the Victoria and Paradise Nurseries, 1882-1897. The Orchid Album was illustrated by the master illustrator of orchids, John Nugent Fitch. His original drawings are in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington. If you are interested in buy these prints, go to <http://www.panteek.com/warner/index.htm>

Upcoming Orchid Shows

**Cape & Islands Orchid Society Show,
Sea Crest Resort, Falmouth, MA, January 27 - 28, 2007**

**New Hampshire Orchid Society Show,
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nashua, NH, February 23 - 25, 2007**

**Connecticut Orchid Society,
West Hartford Meeting Center, West Hartford, CT, March 31 - April 1, 2007**

Tips for Specific Orchid Types

Miltonia/Milioniopsis

Miltonias and Milioniopsis also prefer the same light and watering as the phalaenopsis with humidity between 50% and 60%. They prefer temperatures not to exceed 80°F during the day with night 10° to 20° cooler. Do not allow these to dry out completely.

Next month: Oncidiums



Dendrochilum williamsii



SPARKES' CYMBIDIUM

CYMBIDIUM

C. canaliculatum var. *sparkesii*

Another inhabitant of warm, or even hot, areas, and dry besides, this orchid is found in northern Australia and down into inland regions of eastern Queensland to New South Wales. The plants grow on trees and have tough, leathery, upright leaves. The sprays of flowers hang down below the leaves. Flowers vary in color from clear green, the so-called *alba* variety, to spotted, to a solid, deep red-brown in variety *sparkesii*. In fact, from a distance, the flowers can appear black, but they are not. (Black flowers don't really exist, except in myth and the literary imagination, or the popular "Brenda Starr" comic strip. They are very dark purple or red, usually with a velvety surface that doesn't reflect light—thus causing the illusion.) The plants are not easy to grow in cultivation, but the display is well worth it when they do well.



Smithsonian Orchid Exhibit Invites Visitors to "Take a Walk on the Wild Side"

The Smithsonian's Horticulture Services Division and the U. S. Botanic Garden will open the 13th annual orchid exhibit, "Orchids: Take a Walk on the Wild Side," at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History on Jan. 27, 2007. The exhibit, which depicts a growing trend in ecotourism and research known as a "canopy walk," will feature more than 2,000 of the sought-after plants in 300 varieties. The exhibit will be on display until April 22, 2007.



Don't be alarmed madam
—I'm an orchidophile!