



Southern Region Orchid Workshop, Batemans Bay, 10 & 11 March 2012

(A summary of the notes of a couple of participants, Liz and Tony – E&OE)

The 2011 Workshop was organized by the Batemans Bay Orchid and Foliage Society. The two speakers were nurseryman and retailer, Stephen Stebbings of Orchids on Newbold and Scott Barrie of Barrita Orchids, nurseryman, wholesaler of cut flowers and supplier of orchids in flower to K-Mart.

Stephen Stebbings spoke at the 2010 workshop at Moruya, also. His topics on this occasion included

mounting of various orchids; cool to cold growing *Coelogyne* and *Stanhopea*; and *Sarcs*.

Mounting

Steve demonstrated some of his earlier success with mounting on big chunks of pine bark – such is harder to come by these days. He is disappointed in the composted orchid bark available nowadays, because it is immature and from plantation forests. He liked to use cork as a ‘slab’ medium but expense has driven him to look for other alternatives. An affordable and successful slab is treated and grooved pine decking – he is mounting *dockrillia* on this medium, the plant to the grooved side of the timber. Bush moss, over the roots, and even between the roots and the timber is acceptable. He ties with about 10lb fishing line, which he freely winds around plant and slab, and rather than spending time knotting the line, he staples it to the board. He will use a rooting hormone with small *dockrillias* and plant starter as well. He has used, successfully, one tablespoon of molasses to 20 litres water as a plant starter and applies weekly for the first 4-6 weeks. Slabs are placed on their back until established, 3-6 months.



Cool to Cold Growing *Coelogyne* and *Stanhopeas*

Steve prefers to grow *Coelogyne*s in trays with about 10mm of water which save the bulbs from shriveling, they flower better as a result. Another tip was to grow in plastic pots with a built in saucer. *Coelogyne massangeana* likes water.

A couple of tips for *Stanhopeas* involved the use of plastic basket pots. When dividing *Stanhopeas* they can be put in 6” plastic basket pot (wire the divisions into the pot after adding your media) then place the basket pot inside a regular solid pot. Steve maintains new roots are generated faster. Rather than using wire baskets for flowering size plants, Steve has found that they’ll flower well through the base of a plastic basket pot. He uses a mix of 3 parts bark: 1.5 parts perlite: 1 part charcoal.

Sarcs

Steve has a theory with repotting and deflasking *sarcs* that the roots like to be placed against the side of the pot, they seem to take comfort. [This coincided with the Scott Barry theory of ‘Speed’ for all plants

– they respond well, they’re also quicker to repot, and Scott pots cymbidiums and oncidiums with roots to the side of the pot.]

During a deflasking demonstration Steve was not for mucking about, smart to remove plants from the flask, a quick rinse off in water and into their tubes. He will compost 4-5 smaller plants together in the same size tube as the individual plants, to keep all from the same flask in same size pots for watering etc. He uses a similar mix as already described - bark, perlite, charcoal with a bit more charcoal. Once in their tubes he waters first to flush any fines out of the mix, lets them dry out ‘a bit’ and applies an antifungal (Previcure) on the same day, and then another twice in the next three days. Next action is to apply a plant starter after which he’ll start fertilizing, three days after deflasking.

A couple of tips from Stephen:

- be prepared to cull (chuck out the runts) at every stage,
- most fertilizer companies will recommend twice the strength than is necessary, they want to sell more fertilizer, thus fertilize at half recommended strength. He does not use organic fertilizer.
- if needing to deflask just before winter, he will take 3-4 clumps from the flask, loosen them off a bit and put them into Composts, They will over-winter more satisfactorily.

Scott Barrie’s enterprise, and thus his approach, is totally different to most hobbyists. His roofed greenhouse is larger than a football field and Barrita concentrates on a select mix of Cymbidiums, varicosum style oncidinae, and sarcochilus.

The Barrita mix for Cymbidiums is Growool (similar to Rockwool), Styrene and Perlite in equal amounts. The mix does not degenerate and is sterilized by bleaching for re-use as and when available. Scott relies on the plant obtaining 90% of its air, via the roots. The Barrita fertilizer is typically chemically obtained N70-120:P40-6:K75-120, the rates of which drop when cymbidium flowers are initiating, August-December. He practices ‘stacking’ with his cut-flower cymbidium plants. He strips swinger bulbs (ie old bulbs with leaves) of all leaves and takes ‘hip’ leaves off newer leafy bulbs at end of flowering – this encourages plant to grow back over itself – hence ‘stacking.’ There is no need to divide the plant, less division = more flowers. Barrita’s fully enclosed greenhouse excludes most insect pests, however a severe infestation of caterpillars was effectively controlled by using Dipel. Scott Barrie was not enamoured with organic or urea based fertilizers, given that they need an activator which will break down the usual bark/coconut chip potting medium.

Another of the Barrita lines is the varicosum style oncidinae variety from the Brazilian Highlands, summer temperatures of 18 to 30 degrees range and quite wet preferred but will take it a bit cooler and definitely drier in winter (May-August) 5-25 Degrees range OK. This variety will grow well on slabs where they can dry out between waterings. They’ll perform well in pots in styrene only, weighted down by blue metal. Oncids don’t like being repotted or otherwise disturbed and should double bulb size each year. The growth cycle of these Autumn flowering plants requires water while flowers are developing. There is a long period of inactivity during their dry season during Winter and early Spring. Once new roots start to show it’s the start of their wet season – late Spring/Summer. They are extremely thirsty when in spike and you’ll see bulbs shrivel, particularly in air-conditioned orchid show environments.

The third major Barrita line is Sarcochilus, which are grown in with the Cymbidiums and in the same Growool/Styrene/Perlite mix. They are watered and fertilized every day and are taking fairly bright light, as for the Cymbids. Sarcs are used to water and moisture all the time – misty, air movement required – they have no inbuilt water reservoir system. The Barrita objective is to produce 200,000 Sarcs

per annum to satisfy the retail demand. Scott's breeding program is intended to produce upright flowers – ones that will look up at you from the bottom shelf of the K Mart display rack.

(We hope that you find these notes useful. It is not easy to reflect the context of many of the speakers' comments described above. Most benefit can be obtained by attending such workshops. The next such local workshop will be presented by Eurobodalla Orchid Club in Narooma on 9th and 10th March 2013. Speakers at this workshop will be Ray Clement, Tinonee Orchids and Bill Miles, Orchid Species Plus, don't miss out.)