



# *Orchid Society of Santa Barbara*

**Meeting: Wednesday, July 11, 2001**

**MacKenzie Adult Building  
at MacKenzie Park  
3111 State Street (at Las Positas)  
*Meeting begins at 7:30 pm***

**PROGRAM**

**Jerry Rodder**

**will speak about**

**Fertilizers, Growing Media and Orchid Culture**

This meeting will also include a panel discussion on feeding and culture. For those of you who are looking for culture advice, this is the meeting for you. Come and learn how to get the best out of your plants.

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

### **Santa Barbara Chapter Cymbidium Society Meeting**

Wednesday, July 18, 2001

Cymbidium Society of America judging at 7:15 pm, meeting at 7:45 pm, at Carpinteria Public Library.

### **Santa Barbara Orchid Fair**

July 20-22, 2001

*Santa Barbara Orchid Estate* will once again be hosting their annual vendor extravaganza, with over fifty vendors from all over the world, including vendors from Brazil, Thailand, New Zealand and Venezuela. Cal-Orchid will also host vendors from South Africa, Japan and Australia. Fair Hours:

Friday and Saturday, July 20 and 21 - 9 am to 5 pm

Sunday, July 22 - 10 am to 4 pm at Santa Barbara Orchid Estate; 9 am to 4 pm at Cal-Orchid

For more information, check the internet at:

[www.sborchid.com](http://www.sborchid.com)

[www.calorchid.com](http://www.calorchid.com)

### Summary of the June 2001 Meeting

- **President Sandy Svoboda** welcomed guests Chris Kronberg and Susan from Gallup and Stribling. She also thanked Joyce and Norm Weider for bringing refreshments.
- **The Orchid Fair** is in July. See the front page of the newsletter for details.
- President Svoboda invited the members to attend the June 26 **OSSB Board meeting** at 7 pm at her house, noting that board meetings are open to the membership should they choose to attend.
- Check the announcements table at the next meeting for the following:
  - The new AOS brochure AOS conservation brochure
  - 2002 Orchid Calendar purchase offer
  - Orchidizer organizer purchase Information
  - Eric Christenson's latest taxonomical installment on South American orchids.

### Program

Paul Gripp introduced our June speaker, **George Vasquez**, of Zuma Canyon Orchids. Vasquez and his father have taken what was the Arthur Freed Collection and turned it into an international breeding and production house for phalaenopsis. Vasquez spoke to us about culture and showed us slides of his operation.

For those who are unfamiliar with Zuma Canyon Orchids, the retail location is easily accessible to us, just an hour or two away in Malibu. But the operation is much larger, including mericlone operations in Japan and China and growing ranges in Holland, Florida and Guatemala. The membership was particularly impressed with the potting machine, which helps workers repot 5000 plants a day.

To keep plants pristine for the pot plant market, growing houses are tall (about 25 feet), with screening outside and three sets of nets inside. Booms can water 50,000 plants an hour. Phalaenopsis are excellent for the pot plant market because they bloom so quickly from flask.

Most helpful to the membership was Vasquez's discussion of culture, beginning with his assertion that we should all be repotting our orchids regularly rather than repotting them when they go into decline. Healthy plants are ready to send out new roots in fresh mix, whereas unhealthy plants with poor roots must take time to recuperate.

Vasquez noted that what is considered proper culture is always changing; there is no right or wrong, but instead general guidelines. Currently, with good bark difficult to find, growers are looking for new potting media. When using bark, Vasquez pots with fine (1/4 inch) in 4 inch pots and medium (3/4 inch) in 5 inch pots. His bark mix is 80% bark, 10% perlite, and 10% coconut husk/charcoal, with a little dolomite lime (athletic chalk). Be sure this is well mixed; uniformity in a pot is key. If mix is not uniform, one side of a pot will stay wetter than the other and the plant's roots will be lopsided. Prior to use, bark should be soaked until it is thoroughly wet (use boiling water for a quick soak).

Other media must be used with caution to avoid build-up of salts that halt the growth of the plant. New Zealand moss is often used by commercial growers for quick growth and quick repot (old moss need not be removed when repotting), but one must have very good water or the moss will accumulate salts. Some growers use a "mud" mix (peat and perlite, similar to African Violet mix), but this also accumulates salts if the salt and mineral content is high in the water (as

in Santa Barbara).

Vasquez dislikes pots with holes on the side at the bottom, preferring Popplemann or Kord pots, which have holes on the bottom and "feet" for aeration. Translucent pots allow photosynthesis by the roots. In the bottom of the pots, Vasquez likes to use a layer of plastic peanuts.

For phalaenopsis, optimum temperatures are 66°F nights and 83°F days, with a drop to 61 °F to initiate spiking.

## **"You're Only an Orchid Grower if You've Killed 50 Plants" And Other Gems of Growing Advice**

**By Heidi Kirkpatrick**

*We all should be repotting healthy plants, not constantly rescuing our orchids as they struggle with too-old mix.* Given the current, rather neglected state of my collection (my infant and I are still negotiating about when I'm allowed to work on my orchids), this advice from George Vasquez struck a chord with me. Or perhaps it was simply a sour note of guilt.

In any event, it also reminded me of other growing aphorisms I've heard over the years. We've all heard some of them and either felt guilt at ignoring them or wondered who on earth has the time to follow them.

Take this familiar comment: *Buy plants that will grow well in your particular growing conditions.* This is a noble sentiment and certainly makes a great deal of sense. But when I was growing in my house in Maryland, I fell desperately in love with a species of *Porroglossum*. I knew what they said. This plant must have high humidity.

My humidity wasn't too bad for a home heated by forced air. My obliging spouse had installed a whole-house humidifier but objected to anything much above 50% -- he didn't like water condensing on the cold windows and dripping down onto the sills. I thought: "Well, I'll just mist the thing every day. If worse comes to worse, I'll give it its own humidity dome." Of course, worse came to worse, so I stuck the poor, desiccated thing in a plastic bag where, receiving no air movement, it promptly rotted. I'd like to say I learned a lesson from that experience and only buy what I can grow, but there are some dead orchids in my compost heap that suggest otherwise.

Or how about this unrealistic rule, stated in all seriousness by a lecturer I once heard: *Grow your p/ants so they don't touch, which improves air movement and reduces the spread of insects and disease.* How many orchid houses have we all visited where the pots are cheek to jowl and the leaves on intimate terms with their neighbors? I remember visiting the growing houses of the US Botanic Garden, which supplies the buildings of congress with plants. There were flowering plants on benches with a good six inches of air between leaves - until one got to the orchid house. There, one found plants on the floor, on the greenhouse framing, hanging from above, and crammed on the benches. The scene was the same at the venerable Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania. Ha! I thought. Even public collections can't follow this rule.

A rather common-sense suggestion is *never have more plants than your spouse or friends can water.* Unfortunately, it is difficult to know how many is "too many" until that point has

been reached. My ambitious spouse, who was already in Santa Barbara, told me he could unpack and care for the orchids I shipped from Maryland when we moved. Poor guy had no concept of how much work this would be and I arrived in town to find my orchids colonizing the tile floors of the house, interspersed with packing material. I obviously had long surpassed the number of plants he could handle.

Common orchid growing advice that bewilders many novices is *keep it moist but not wet*. As a new grower, I thought, "What the heck does that mean?" and gave my wilting plant another shot of water. When it died, I realized it had indeed been starving for water ... because I'd already rotted all the roots off by overwatering. I decided that I preferred the phrase, *when in doubt, wait another day to water*.

Finally, let me say a few words about my favorite orchid maxim: *You're only an orchid grower if you've killed 50 (or 25 or 100, depending on the enthusiasm of the speaker) orchids*. I was a new grower when I first heard this and remember thinking that I'd assumed the goal was to keep the things alive, not kill them off. And fifty orchids! At a modest \$10 to \$20 a pop, that was how much money?

These days, I carefully avoid doing the math, having killed more orchids than I care to admit. But, like many orchid growers, I'm an optimist and keep trying new and challenging plants in the hopes that I learned something from the ones I've killed. And also like other orchid growers, I find that an exotic plant blooming on my bench has three irresistible qualities: it's rare; it's beautiful; and it's mine.

So should we ignore all the orchid advice out there? The answer is no ... and yes. Successful orchid growers can be a font of wonderful advice, but what works for one grower's conditions may fail miserably for someone else. The trick, then, is to learn to pick and choose, to figure out the reason for the advice and whether it applies to us. Sometimes, we can do that only by experimentation. So happy experimenting everyone and don't forget to tell me if you have any particularly good growing advice!

### Announcements

## **August Society BBQ**

August is time for our annual society BBQ in conjunction with the Santa Barbara Chapter of the Cymbidium Society, held once again on the grounds of the Santa Barbara Orchid Estate. Come enjoy a social afternoon with your friends and munch away at tri-tip, chicken, cole slaw, beans and garlic bread. Show up early to have a browse around the Orchid Estate and see what's in bloom.

Please pay in advance so we know how much food is needed. Carole Cowan will accept paid reservations at the July meeting, or you can send her a check payable to OSSB no later than August 1. Carole is at 209 Cedar Lane, Santa Barbara, CA 93108.

Date: Sunday, August 12, 2001  
Location: Santa Barbara Orchid Estate  
Time: 4 p. m.  
Cost: \$6 per member

There are some tables at the Orchid Estate, but if you have a folding table, consider bringing it along with your folding chairs. Bring your own drink if you don't want coffee. If anyone out there is good with dessert, this is a perfect time to wow your friends with your culinary expertise. And don't forget to bring plants for the silent auction. There is no limit to the number of plants you may bring to this event. The society will receive its usual 20% of the sale price.

#### **40 Watt Wide Spectrum Fluorescent Bulbs for Sale**

Heidi Kirkpatrick is selling an unopened box of fluorescent bulbs for indoor gardening. The box contains 12 bulbs and was purchased from IGS (see the AOS Orchids magazine). I've dismantled my light cart and no longer have a use for them. IGS sells them for \$62 plus shipping. I'll sell them for \$45.

Call me at 563-2894. See *OSSB* on the web at [www.west.net/orchidsb](http://www.west.net/orchidsb)

Orchid Society of Santa Barbara  
Heidi Kirkpatrick, Secretary  
2687 Dorking Place  
Santa Barbara, CA 93105