

Ten Commandments for an Orchid Grower

by Ernest Hetherington

LEARN BASIC GOOD CULTURE. An average orchid, well grown, will give you better flowers than a fine variety poorly grown. When breeding is set for a particular plant it cannot be changed. Only the full potential for that variety can be developed through good culture. As simple as it may sound, learn how to water the various genera, learn how to feed and adjust the light. Do not be continually experimenting with new mixes, feeding procedures and all sorts of techniques until you have learned the basics. Develop a good relationship with a grower whose opinions you respect, and who has demonstrated his skills. Listen to him. Wait until you have proven for yourself that you have mastered the basics of good culture before you start out to revolutionize the orchid world.

PROVIDE PROPER GROWING FACILITIES. A shade house is best. Don't try raising orchids under adverse conditions unless it is absolutely necessary. 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 to commercial orchid growers. I am one myself more plants will follow if you are successful with your first ones.

WATCH FOR "CREEPING OBSOLESCENCE." An orchid collection is forever changing. Your interests do not remain the same. What you liked yesterday will not be your favourite tomorrow. As you build your collection, you will find your tastes become more refined and selective. Realize that you have just so much space, time, energy and money to spend. Get the most satisfaction and pleasure from your orchids. If you have plants which you know are diseased or not doing well, get rid of them (I rime you!). Good orchid plants are no longer expensive. Make sure that every plant produces well and give you the blooms you desire. If you have cattleyas, count the leaves on a mature plant. How many out of this total have flowered? You can tell by the flower stubs in the leaf axils. Most should have; otherwise that plant is a non-blooming, boarder. Do you have a plant which won't flower though you are determined to make it do so? Give it a fair trial under varying conditions. If it still doesn't flower, get rid of it. There are other plants waiting to take its place. Do you have a plant which flowers well for you but which has inferior flowers? You have divided it. Now you have a dozen plants of the same variety? Give some away to someone who is starting, or as gift plants. Make room for better quality. Keep upgrading your collection and you will get more pleasure from it.

LEARN 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 and books on the subject in your library. I can suggest you realize that orchids have certain diseases which can be spread. What a shame to have a beautiful and perhaps expensive variety become infected with virus merely because you did not learn about virus prevention. -Learn basic pest control. Common orchid scale is so easily identified and eradicated with modern insecticides. Learn what a red spider looks like and be on the alert for it. How often beautiful blooms are eaten by slugs and snails, and yet there are so many effective baits available. As for aseptic technique, do not cut your flowers until you have sterilized your cutting tool. There are good chemical sterilizers available.