

SUTHERLAND SHIRE ORCHID SOCIETY

Dockrillia Striolata



Dockrillia striolata 'Strez'

Dockrillia striolata is a most interesting native species. It was once the only dendrobium found in Tasmania but now it is the only dockrillia to grow naturally in our southernmost state. The fact that it grows in much colder conditions than the other lithophytes makes it worthy of respect let alone its ability to somehow jump the big ditch between Victoria and Tassie.

I find its growth habit to be very interesting as well. The thin wiry sections of rhizome are just strong enough to support the short, smooth 'pencils' away from the base of the plant. A specimen plant takes on the appearance of a novelty wig of thick green hair that has been neatly combed in a downwards direction. Occasionally the wig will take on varying shades of purple but only when it has been exposed to strong sunlight.

Dockrillia striolata is a really tenacious plant that is generally very easy to grow. It will readily send its thick white roots into a bark and pebbles mixture or any of the usual cork, treefern or hardwood mounts. Most of my plants are happily mounted on gutterguard cylinders packed with treated bark and a few strands of sphagnum moss. I have one very large plant that has happily overgrown its gutterguard mount over the past eighteen years. I also have many plants growing on the trees in my backyard. Every time a piece breaks off one of my other plants I tie it, using strips of stocking, onto one of the citrus, bottlebrushes or treeferns that grow in my backyard. Over the years these trees have grown upwards taking the shade with them leaving the striolata plants in full sun for long periods during the day. Their response has been to develop purple leaves and keep growing strongly despite the extra UV.

Most plants of striolata flower reliably each spring, a most interesting event once you become aware of the enormous variety of flower forms. Apart from the expected variations in flower size there is an enormous range of colour forms from the pure green albino forms through to dark yellows which have varying degrees of brown-purple striping. Most forms feature a relatively large wavy labellum although some forms such as the cultivar 'Ruffles' must have extra spectacular lips.



Dockrillia striolata 'Wattagan'

I used to think of Dockrillia striolata as a pretty uninteresting, even daggy, orchid that I only grew because someone had given me the plants. I have changed my mind on this after appreciating the variable nature of plants that I have from sources as far apart as Tasmania to north of Dungog. I have become so interested in this species that I am now on the lookout for new and superior forms.



Dockrillia striolata var. Alba

If this little story seems amazing then it would have to me too - until I opened my eyes to this 'daggy gem' a few years ago.

Neville Roper
March 2003