

The Five (or so) Best Sarcochilus Crosses

I was talking orchids, more specifically Sarcochilus with Kevin "Grouchy" Wilson over dinner one night when I posed the question "What do you reckon are the five best Sarco. crosses ever made?" Pretty simple question and you would think that the answer would be simple too considering that they are a relatively small group of orchids with only a short period of cultivation and hybridisation. Ultimately we couldn't reach a consensus. There was a temptation to promote the very recent crosses that have been producing exciting results but these crosses have not stood the test of time nor would they be familiar to most orchid folk. For what it is worth here goes with my thoughts on the best five Sarco. crosses that have stood the test of time - their virtues and their vices.

Sarco Fitzhart (hartmannii X fitzgeraldii)

Virtues

- A primary hybrid so it has great growth vigour
- Prolific flower production
- Second generation (such as a sibling cross or an outcross between two unrelated Fitzharts) have a high percentage of highly coloured clones. Some have improved flower shape
- A reasonably fertile parent which has produced some great crosses - Heidi, Jeanne, Fizzy Dove, Sweetheart, Burgundy On Ice
- A very bright future as a grandparent with credits such as Orange Glow, Hot Ice and Kirra Lea



Sarco. Fitzhart 'Sparky'

Vices

- As an older cross that was made with the best parents available at the time but which would now be considered to be inferior. Clones from these early crosses are mostly lacking in flower quality.
- Generally the more intensely coloured clones from the newer sibling crosses tend to be smaller than expected.

Sarco. Weinhart (hartmannii X weinthalii)

Virtues

- Much easier to cultivate than weinthalii
- Flowers are as cute as 'all get out'
- Great variety of colour forms - yellow, cream or almost white with brown to purple flushing and spots. There are some pure yellow forms
- Some clones clump and form specimens rapidly
- Very generous flower production and this usually starts in a 50mm tube
- Generally have a good shaped flower, some clones are very round and filled-in.
- Great parent that produces a range of colourful, often spotted flowers on smallish plants - Jeanne, Jewell, Billie, Pixie Pearls which will often flower at different times of the year.



Sarco. Orange Glow 'Flame'

Vices

- While easier to cultivate than weinthalii some clones are very tardy
- If size matters then the flowers could be a little on the small side

Sarco. Melba (Hartmannii X falcatus)

Virtues

- Crystalline white flowers with wonderfully contrasting red spots in the centre
- Large flowers (sometimes very!)
- Excellently shaped, filled-in flowers
- Long, elegant racemes of flowers
- Grows vigorously and will flower off small plants, especially if falcatus is the pod parent.
- Can flower at different times of the year and several times during the year
- Great parent producing George Colthup, Judith, Melody
- Proven grandparent with Dove, Burgundy On Ice, Fizzy Dove, Lyn etc to its credit



Sarco. Burgundy on Ice

Vices

- Some clones are progressive flowerers especially when they flower out of season (not in spring)
- Some clones, especially the monster flowers are distorted with ridge type tissue along the edges of the sepals
- In instances where falcatus has been used as the pod parent there is a tendency towards shorter racemes and less filled-in flowers.

Sarco. Jeanne (Fitzhart X Weinhart)

Virtues

- Although not as widely available as the above nominations this cross deserves credit for a kaleidoscope of colours from dirty red-browns, vibrant reds, spots, whites, yellows, combinations of the above and even albas
- Small free-flowering plants
- Good shaped flowers with crystalline surfaces
- The early signs are that it will be a good parent -Orange Glow, Molly



Sarco. Jeanne 'Little Gem'

Vices

- Smallish flowers
- Not widely available as it is not an easy cross to get seed from - a reluctant parent
- Some clones can be touchier to grow than either parent

Sarco. Judith (Melba X Fitzhart)

Virtues

- One of the first hybrids not to have a species as a parent and so has a wide diversity of genes.
- Robust grower which will flower from small plants but will readily form large clumped specimens.
- Produces long racemes in abundance
- Typically has crystalline white flowers with varying amounts of red towards the centre although pink clones are not uncommon
- Generally produce large flowers of considerable substance. Good clones have well filled-in flowers.

- A reasonably willing parent of quality hybrids such as Burgundy On Ice, Yvonne, Jedda, Norma and Duno Judilly

Vices

- There are no obvious weaknesses although many of the early Burgundy On Ice clones were shy to flower and when they did the buds on each raceme often opened erratically over several months. Newer crosses seem to have eliminated this fault.

Sarco Velvet (Nicky X Riverdene)

Virtues

- Can be in a range of colours from full red to brown or yellow with varying amounts of red at the centre.
- Multiple flowerings during the year with a more reliable period towards November has lengthened the flowering season towards Christmas
- Produces large reasonably filled-in flowers of tremendous substance.
- Showing early signs of being an excellent parent with Bessie (X George Colthup) and Jill (X Fairy) already achieving wins on the show bench.



Sarco. Velvet 'Ripper'

Vices

- A slow but steady grower.
- Progressive flowerer with most clones starting out with about six fully open flowers which dwindles over time to one or two flowers on the tip of a very long raceme

Sarco Cherie (Fitzhart X fitzgeraldii)

Virtues

- A much easier proposition to grow than fitzgeraldii.
- Probably the first hybrid to approach the much awaited 'full red sarco.' status, something that some clones approached but few actually achieved. They were dark pink at best but, for their time, very colourful.
- A major breeding breakthrough as Cherie seemed to be more generous in passing colour genes to its offspring than either of its parents.
- Some surprisingly rare remakes have produced much more intensely coloured clones with much better flower form - largely due to improvement in the Fitzhart parents.
- An outstanding parent with offspring such as Redstone, Cherie Snow, Yvette and Yvonne.

Vices

- Early crosses produced smallish flowers with a dominant fitzgeraldii influence featuring ping-pong bat shaped segments.
- An old cross that has largely been superseded by newer, better hybrids most of which are descendents but never the less deserves a place in this hall of fame.

Conclusion

Quite simply, as I explained to Grouchy after several beverages, its easy to identify the **five** best Sarcochilus crosses made so far.

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