

A Mixed Collection

Growing orchids as a hobby grower is all about producing flowers that are aesthetically pleasing and available to enjoy throughout the year. This aim is best achieved by keeping a variety of genera growing in compatible microclimates. The growing conditions I based my mixed collection on takes in orchids from the "cool" to "intermediate" temperature range. This encompasses a lot of genera and gives the desired all round flowering we strive to achieve. In this type of collection there are some, "must have" plants that are so rewarding year after year.

Cattleyas



In listing them as cattleyas, I of course mean the laelinae alliance. The large flowered cattleyas I find like a little more warmth than I can provide to be flowered at their very best in intermediate conditions. However, there are a vast number of miniature, cluster and species cattleyas, laelias and various intergeneric hybrids that grow and flower very well in intermediate conditions. Grow them up high or hang them from the top shelves where they receive good light, air movement and receive the rising humidity from under the benches. Watch out on a regular basis for

insect pests, such as scale and mealy bugs. When you find them, treat them immediately making sure they cannot escape and infest another plant. These are beautiful flowers that can be produced through most of the year!

Dendrobiums

This is an enormous family of orchids, which fortunately has a lot of cool to intermediate growers. Australian native species and hybrids can take a large temperature range. My native hybrids and species grow largely around the outside of my glasshouse, only receiving protection from the elements with a little shade cloth during the heat of summer. They love the rainwater and air movement. I grow all my soft cane hybrids and species hanging up in pots just under the roof. They receive strong light, good air movement, are never over potted and receive lots of water.



Oncidinae



I have previously outlined how I grow this alliance in previous articles using the lower benches where they are shaded by the overhanging plants. These plants all do better for me if they are housed in a glasshouse where watering and air movement can be controlled. Oncidiums enjoy being grown in hanging containers, either mounted or in hanging baskets.

Lycastes/Pleurothallidinae

I grow all these plants on the "bottom" layer of my houses. The lycastes shade the Pleurothallis alliance plants ... and flower freely. Let your lycastes dry out a little in winter (the bulbs shrivel a little). This assists flowering in spring.

Paphiopedilums/Cymbidiums

I find these two lovely genera also grow very well together. I grow my cymbidiums largely in a fibreglass roofed bush house. A lot of my paphiopedilums grow with them in these conditions. The mottled leaved and multifloral paphiopedilums grow in the glasshouse, with plants always in flower.



I find it is good management practice to grow as many of your plants in the same medium. I grow all the described plants in orchids bark and nothing else. I replot the whole collection regularly. Small pots every eighteen months to two years, and the larger specimen plants every three years. I fertilise all my plants the same. I rotate a weak mixture of organic fertiliser with chemical fertilizer on a weekly basis. I similarly rotate high nitrogen and low nitrogen on the same weekly basis. After all, what I want from my plants is year-round flowering and where possible year-round growth.

Always be prepared to move your plants around and try different positions offering more light, air movement, shade, etc.... You will often be surprised at the difference a move of a couple of meters can make.

A mixed collection offers the orchid lover not only year round flowers but the opportunity and challenge associated with housing and growing a wide range of plants from a wide range of native environs.



Species



There are so many wonderful species you can add to a mixed collection. I have a considerable interest in the Coelogyne and Maxillaria families. I find they have some wonderful easy grow species and hybrids in there families that regularly flower throughout the year as growth mature. Seek some of them out and I am sure you will enjoy their charm and diversity.

Also hanging from the roof are a few plants in the vandaceous alliance.

Ascocentrums, Neofinetia, Angraecums, Catasetums etc. will all grow if given little water in the winter and grown where they receive maximum light year-round.

A mixed collection definitely does give you the opportunity to have plants in flower throughout the year. In so doing it expands your interest and the hobby as plants come into flower.

Gary Hart, 2007