



April 1, 2020 Newsletter

From the President's Potting Bench

I hope that all of you are keeping healthy and in good spirits. I know we are all missing the camaraderie that we have in our shared love of orchids. It is unfortunate that we have had to cancel our monthly meeting and our show. I appreciate all the hard work by the show committee and know that we will be inspired to put on a fantastic show next year. A special thank you to Eric for setting up the display at the SBIOS.

Speaking of fantastic shows, I want to recognize our own Vice President, Ed Lysek, for creating Orchids: Nature's Masterpiece. Ed and his wife, Deb brought together orchid-themed works from many talented artists, immaculately paired and arranged with live orchids at the Studios on the Park in Paso Robles. The show was indeed an exquisite masterpiece.

As for my corner of the orchid world spring has finally come to my little greenhouse in Los Osos. The days are getting longer. We've had a lot of rain and it's getting warmer. It's really exciting to see the orchids wake up, form new roots and flower buds.

I have a couple *Dendrobiums* developing flower stalks and flower buds. I'm excited that several of the new *Sarcochilus* crosses from Sunset Valley Orchids are forming flower spikes.

Around the yard several *Epidendrums* are blooming. The *Bletilla striata* is in bloom among the succulents. Many of my *Cymbidiums* have already bloomed in March and others are just now opening their flowers. My *Sobralias* have been enjoying the rain water and today's sun.

One way I've been celebrating orchids is by touring orchid groups on Facebook. More and more people are using this avenue to show their orchids and ask for advice. The American Orchid Society Facebook page is fairly active, and there have been several excellent examples of orchids with metabolic deficiencies that are so often a mystery

when they appear. A picture of a sickly looking orchid often get the most attention as people will post their observations and recommendations. Spoiler alert: Beware calcium deficiencies!

A new Facebook group called Norman Fangs Private Reserve Orchids is Private group, by invitation only. Norman gives talks on his orchids, often showing first bloom seedlings as well as some his more established stock of plants. His new *Phalaenopsis* harlequins are really something special and worth seeing.

Another Facebook group is monitored by Peter Lin of Diamond Orchids, who often shows off his plants. I broke down a few weeks ago and ordered a cool-growing Vanda Dragon Fire from him.

It's remarkable to be able to communicate directly with these growers through the Facebook chat function. I've had almost immediate responses from growers, even when I've been on Facebook late in the evening. A few other orchid nurseries have quickly adapted to the times and are offering online sales and shows.

We do not yet know when we will meet again but we will let you know as soon as the County Health Department decides that we may gather together. In the meantime, please take care of yourself and enjoy the beauty that you bring into the world through your care and love of orchids.

Please feel free to forward this newsletter to friends who might be interested in knowing about Five Cities Orchid Society and encourage them to subscribe at www.fcoss.org.

Cattleya gargantua - lost to future generations

The following article comes from American Orchid Society Bulletin April 1, 1987 Vol. 56, Number 3. I hope you find this 33 year old article both informative and worth reading in these somewhat stressful times. It is one of my favorites. -Ed Lysek

Isolated deep in the recesses of Territorio Amazonas of Venezuela, secreted in the largely unexplored Upper Orinoco highlands, once grew the world's largest *Cattleya* species. Until the early 19th century, only one peaceful Indian tribe of hunters and fishermen knew of its

existence. The orchid was treated as a god, and well it could have been for its pseudobulbs towered up to 10 feet, and its flowers stretched to three feet in natural spread. The Indians and the *Cattleya* both prospered without what some have chosen to call the civilized world. □

But in 1837, following on the successes of other European forays into South America to transmit floral riches to the Continent, into these lost, idyllic heights rode Baron Wilhelm von Strudel, a Teutonic cross between Indiana Jones and Frank Bring Em Back Alive Buck. Von Strudel and several bearers-for-hire had made their way on horseback, collecting an *Epidendrum* here, a *Sobralia* there, but were completely unprepared for the majesty of the orchid waiting for them in the Indian village cut off from the march of time. There, flowering on the thatched huts, were the largest orchids von Strudel had ever seen. He traded some pastries of his own recipe for information on where to find these *Cattleya* flowers of incredible size, blazing amethyst color, and overpowering fragrance. He and the bearers loaded up the horses with as many plants as the animals could shoulder before heading back to the Venezuelan coast and the triumphant voyage home. Von Strudel sold all of the plants for prices that more than defrayed the cost of his expedition, save one plant which he gave to H. G. Reichenbach the younger, who aptly described the species as *Cattleya gargantua* in *Gardeners Chronicle*.

Disaster struck during von Strudel's return voyage for more plants. Historians tell us that his ship was inexplicably lost in the Bermuda Triangle, taking knowledge of the location of the hidden village down to Davy Jones's locker with him.

Not until the 1950's was *Cattleya gargantua* rediscovered by some scientists from the University at Caracas, but only two plants were to be found. Evidently polyploidy and excessive size had worked against the species, for under their own weight pseudobulbs would bend toward the ground. As a result, fewer and fewer flowers were produced, and the frustrated natural pollinators migrated from the area.

Of these last two plants, one was carefully shipped off for study by academics. The National Science Foundation funded a million-dollar grant for cytological studies of *Cattleya gargantua*. Work had begun when the plant suddenly succumbed to black rot.

In a last-ditch effort to reestablish the species in nature, the second plant was spirited away to a secret natural preserve in Amazonas with all the stealth of a Robert Ludlum novel. Given human nature, though, it was not long before a syndicate of unscrupulous collectors discovered the plant and carried it off by helicopter under the cover of night. As the modern-day pirates flew over the Caribbean, their rotor mechanism failed, and the helicopter with its priceless treasure plunged to a watery grave.

Future generations have but the adjacent, rare photograph of *Cattleya gargantua* to emphasize the desperate need for conservation of all tropical forests and to impart that this is after all, April 1 (Happy April Fools Day). - Alec M. Pridgeon.



Photographer: J

***Cattleya gargantua* in happier days.**

How about a Virtual Show and Tell from several of our members. Since it looks like it may be a while before we return to regular meetings, please email [Ed Lysek](mailto:Ed.Lysek) with your photos and comments for next month's newsletter.



Judy Scheithauer's *Ansellia africana* has reached 6 ft high and continues to add height each year. This one gets really Big - almost as tall as the now extinct *Cattleya gargantua*!



A close up of the giraffe color pattern of *Ansellia africana*. This one is blooming in Ed Lysek's greenhouse and is half the size of Judy's.



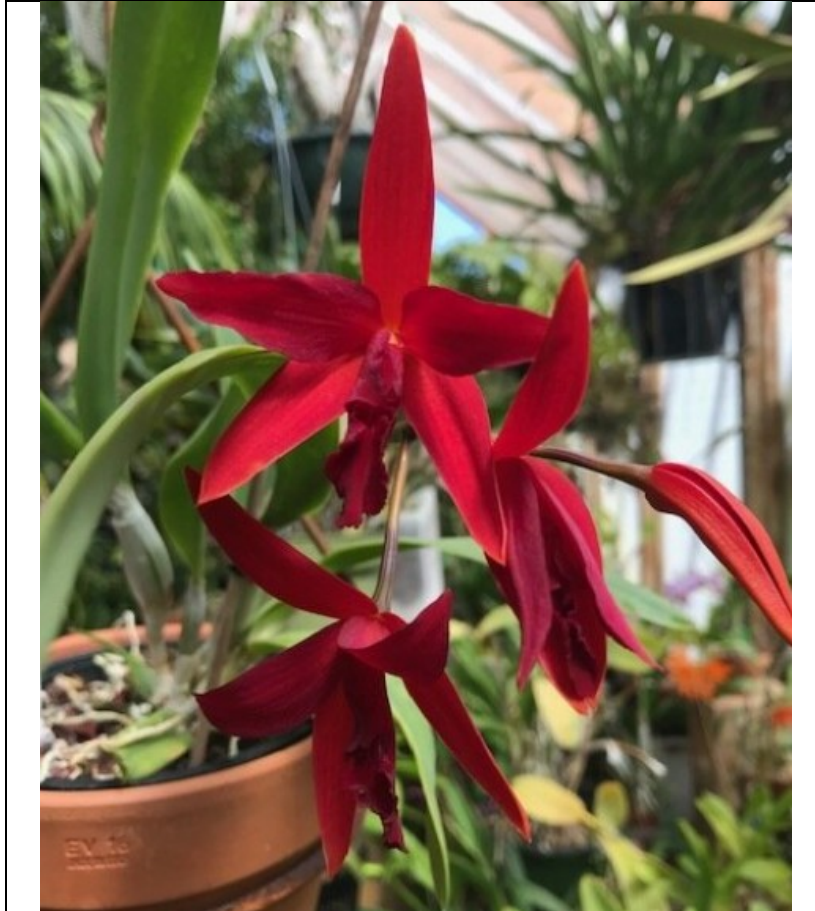
Alan Durham says, This is my first orchid I purchased from Cal Poly green houses in about 1980. It is a *Cattleya* and grows in my indoor spa. Of course I have split it several times and have killed some, given away some, and I also have some blooming outside also. Since lightning is better outside I think the one outside blooms more often. I figured when I got it that it was probably going to start breathing it's last breaths but it has hung in there to give me another beautiful flower.



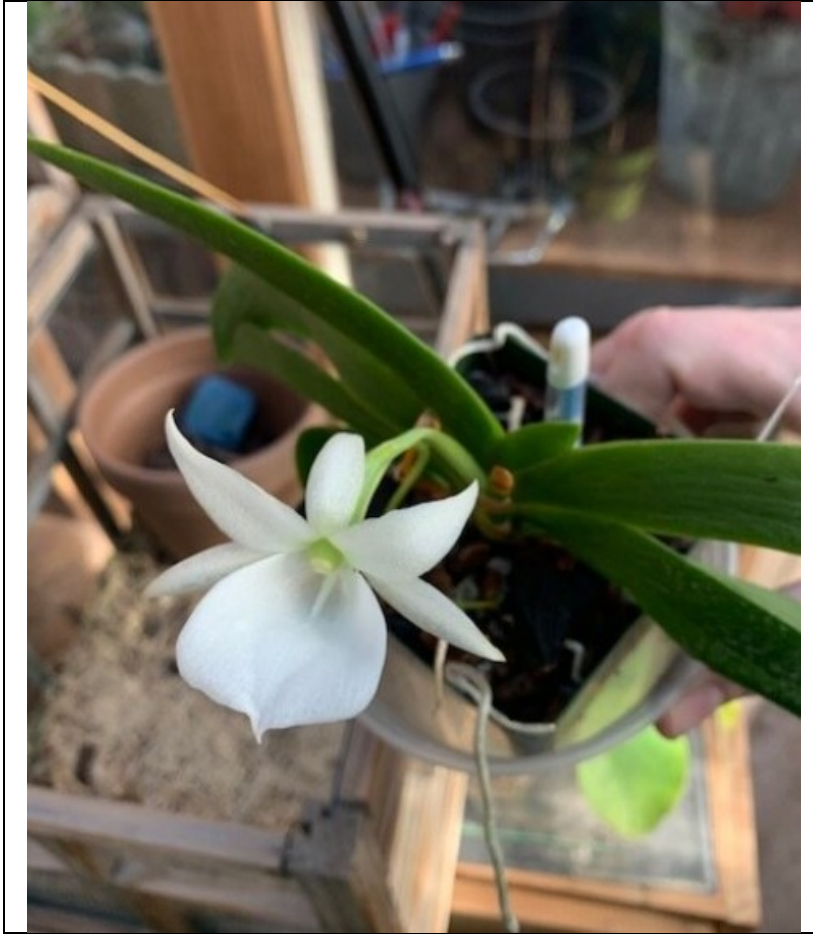
Chris Ehrler writes, I have attached photos of two clones of *Masdevallia caudata* for the newsletter. They are both grown in the greenhouse but would grow outside fine as long as not in direct sun. Keep temperature below 80 F when possible and needs to cool down at night. I apply a weak Cal-Mg type fertilizer solution once each week (1/4 teaspoon in 2 gallons of rain or reverse osmosis water).



Chris' *Masdevallia caudata* (second clone) up close and personal.



Ed Lysek is seeing a range of colors from orange to this bright red Slc hybrid from his flask grown seedlings of Sunset Valley Orchids Flask #7056. Look for some of these seedlings on the raffle table when things get back to normal. See more photos of this cross on the FCOS Instagram page ([Fivecitiesorchid on Instagram](#)).



Jeff Parham's *Angraecum* is blooming and looking really happy. I think you can smell the fragrance!



The dictionary defines ephemeral as lasting for a very short time.

The *ephemeral* FCOS exhibit at the Santa Barbara International Orchid Show wins the prize for the fastest set up and take down in SBIOE history. Many thanks to everyone who worked on the exhibit and submitted orchids for display.



Why You Should NOT Just Add Ice

By now, many orchid growers, beginners and experienced alike, have heard the theory about watering orchids with ice cubes. In case you haven't, it goes something like this.

Water your Orchid with three ice cubes a week and it will be happy as can be. □

Sadly, though it may be given with the best of intentions, this advice is problematic and has caused a lot of misinformation to be spread online and through social media. The kernel of truth in the Just Add Ice myth/marketing gimmick is that most people who kill orchids do so by over-watering them. But it's not the amount of water people use when watering orchids that leads to over-watering, it's how long the roots stay wet.

Remember where your orchid is from. Plants known as 'Ice Orchids' are simply *Phalaenopsis* Orchids or Moth Orchids that originated in tropical Southeast Asia. They are intermediate to warm growing, which means their native environment is usually a minimum of 60 degrees anytime of year. Not really ice cube type weather.

Phalaenopsis in nature grow attached to trees, shrubs or outcroppings with their roots exposed, They are watered frequently by rainfall, but because their roots don't have much around them to hold water, they dry out between waterings. Their roots need humidity but should not stay soggy.

We always suggest watering potted orchids thoroughly from the top of the pot, with room temperature or tepid water. Water well enough to saturate the media so that it stays damp for a minimum of 4-5 days or as long as 7-10 days.

This number won't be exact because it varies with the amount of light, humidity and airflow and with the temperature where they are grown. If your plant is staying wet for longer than 10-14 days, then additional airflow may be needed. If your potted orchid needs water more than twice per week, then not enough water is being given or it's time to consider repotting (see our Repotting Information here). If the mix is very dry on watering day, water well and come back twenty minutes later and water again. This helps the outer layer of bark, mulch or moss absorb the moisture better. Plus, it flushes free any water impurities or fertilizer salts that collect in the pot.

This wet-dry cycle is needed in one form or another for many of the most commonly found orchids. Adding a few cubes to the top of the media does not address the need to thoroughly water the roots and potting media. As the ice melts, some water trickles into the pots, but not enough to really provide humidity or flush the potting mix of any water impurities or fertilizer salts. Also, remember, these are tropical plants. The ice is likely to cause damage to the roots and foliage it comes in contact with.

Ice cubes may work for some growers for a while, but they are not what your *Phalaenopsis* needs long term. Ice Orchids fit with the marketing strategy of box stores, grocery stores and hardware stores today that sell orchids as a disposable alternative to cut flowers. The flowers last longer than a bouquet of cut flowers, and since they are usually very cost friendly, if they die in 6-12 months many people are okay with replacing them. We teach our visitors and new customers how to care for Orchids with an eye to the future. Orchids can be a long-term investment that produce a lot of joy. Bringing your well-grown orchid into bloom year after year can be extremely rewarding.

So just remember, your orchid doesn't like taking an ice bath anymore than you do!

For more information from other sources follow the links below:

<http://oregonorchidsociety.org/ice-cubes-and-orchids>

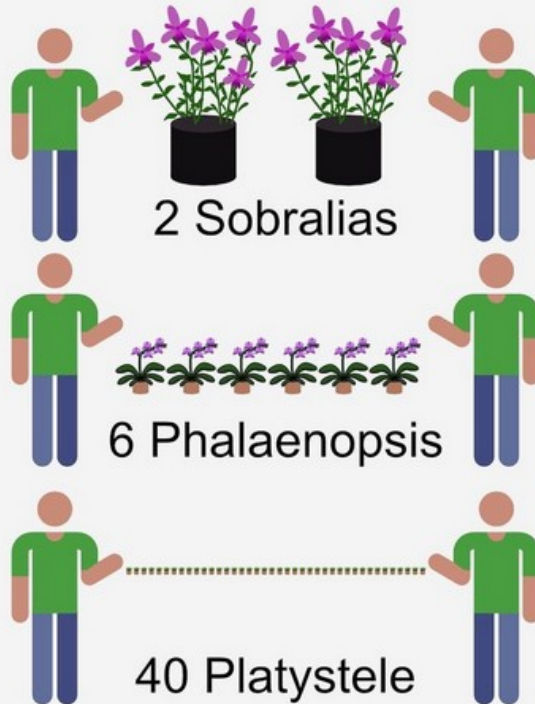
<https://www.gardenmyths.com/watering-orchids-with-ice-cubes/>

<https://orchidrepublic.com/blogs/news/ice-cubes-worst-advice-growing-orchids>

Reprinted by permission from Carter and Holmes Orchids. See their new website at www.carterandholmes.com

Sunset Valley Orchids has a sign in their sales area that states something like do not use ice cubes on your orchids but save them for your nightly drink.

Social Distancing Guide For Orchid People



Forwarded by Grace Skidmore, [The Chapman Estate](#).

Orchids are really great and so are the people who grow and share them!
Stay safe and healthy and looking forward to getting back together as a society in the not too distant future.

Five Cities Orchid Society, P.O. Box 1066, Grover Beach, CA 93483-1066, USA

Powered by  SQUARESPACE