

Venice Area Orchid Society News

Jan. 2014

Next Meeting:

Wed. Jan. 8th at 7:00 p.m.

Topic: "A Few Encyclias to Enjoy"

Jim Roberts is probably well known to many of our members, as he's been our presenter twice before, each time being so well received that members clamored for his return.



Jim is the owner of Florida SunCoast Orchids, located near Myakka City where he grows Cattleya, Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium, Vanda and Encyclia orchids in his three greenhouses encompassing 10,000 square feet. The greenhouses are open only by appointment, but Jim exhibits at numerous shows throughout the state and his plants can be found at local markets in our area. He specializes in Cattleya and Encyclia hybrids, most in 4-inch and 6-inch pots and baskets, with both larger and smaller sizes usually available.

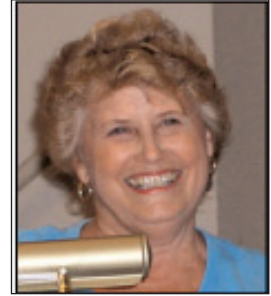
Jim always strives to grow and sell the best quality orchids for his customers and to build a lasting reputation in the industry as one of the very best. Once again, his presentation will be enjoyed by both beginner and intermediate/advanced growers.

Jim will bring a great selection of his best orchids for sale and you should check out his website, <http://www.floridasuncoastorchids.com/>, for lots of information, beautiful photos and ordering plants online.

Jim will be accepting email preorders for orchids on his website which he will then bring to the January meeting and is offering a 10% discount on all purchases. Please see page 6 for exact ordering instructions. Don't wait too long!! Deadline for preorders is Jan. 2, 2014. **This is a great opportunity to support one of our few remaining local growers!**

A Message From Your President

I'm still aglow from our Holiday Party! It was a first class event for a first class society with everyone dressing up to make it an elegant affair. The music was enchanting, the meal was very fine (especially the Prime Rib) and the Christmas decor inside the Boca Royale Golf and Country Club was beautiful. Thank you, Janice Felski, VP Social Events, for making this evening so lovely.



Cynthia Vance

Also thank you, Ali, for tracking registrations and Gerry Thomas for arranging for the music. More people were jitterbugging on the dance floor with a "young couple" (could have been Bruce Weaver and his wife, Victoria) showing off their steps. Personally, I didn't know that Bill Timm could jitterbug so well. It's also called the East Coast Swing or, in my days, the Lindy.

Speaking of Bill Timm, the auction of plants was the highlight of the evening. After each plant was auctioned, Bill changed his hats. We were hysterical with the progression of absurd hats ending with a Rasta hair wig. (See the photos of the party). Jimmy Thomas had procured many lovely blooming plants from Palmer Orchids. Yes, blooming plants!! Each plant was described by either Jimmy or John Masters and we learned much about the history, or blooming frequency of the particular hybrid – or of great interest – how much the plant would cost if purchased retail.



Blc. Booth Lee

One favorite was a young "Panchera Blue" Vanda, a signature plant from Palmer, that goes for \$35.00. Our members received this for a bid as small as \$20.00 – and we had 4-5 Panchera Blues! Of course both Jimmy and John motivated attendees to purchase certain classics like Blc. Booth Lee before

WWW.VAOS.ORG

Continued on page 5

Venice Area Orchid Society, P.O. Box 443, Venice, FL 34284-0443

Officers 2013 – 2014

President

Cynthia Vance, pres@vaos.org

Vice President - Programs

Jim Thomas, programs@vaos.org

Vice President - Social Affairs

Janice Felski, social@vaos.org

Vice President - Show Displays

Richard Amos, disp@vaos.org

Treasurer

Ali Hicks, tres@vaos.org

Recording Secretary & Mentor Coordinator

Peg Fahrenback, rsec@vaos.org

Communications Director & Newsletter Editor

Steve Vogelhaupt, csec@vaos.org

Membership Chairs

Jay & Judy Loeffler, memb@vaos.org

Immediate Past President & Webmaster

Ted Kellogg, tmkellogg@gmail.com

Annual Show Chairs

Carol Wood

Judy Loeffler

showchair@vaos.org

Volunteers

The Cullens, Raffle Table

Judy Russell, Plant Table

Jerry Manegold, Technology

Sharon Schneider, Librarian

Newsletter Production

Barry Zack

VAOS Printer

Creative Technology of Sarasota

Pot. Memoria Jack Severson

Many of us were at our 50th Anniversary celebration in 2012 during which we honored the many contributions and achievements of Jack Severson, our first president. VAOS created the Jack Severson Award for our annual show and named a new hybrid cross, developed by Fenders Flora, "C. Memoria Jack Severson" in his honor. All attendees were given a seedling from the cross and Nora Berger, one of our newer members, recently sent this photo of what may be the first bloom from this collection of seedlings.



Pot. Memoria Jack Severson

Nora said that while she's always thrilled when one of her orchids blooms, she was ecstatic to see the gorgeous colors and is happy to share it with all our members.

Great job, Nora!

Editor's note: The Orchid Review, volume 120, number 1299, Sept. 2012, included the newly-named hybrid in the Quarterly Supplement to the International Register and Checklist of Orchid Hybrids, April – June 2012.

The orchid is listed under the genus *Rhyncholaeliocattleya* (synonym *Potinara*) as *Rlc. Memoria Jack Severson* with seed parent *Rlc. Linda Phelps* and pollen parent *C. Royal Emperor*.

—Article by Steve Vogelhaupt and photo by Nora Berger

December, 2013	
Checking Account	
Starting Balance	
11/15/2013	2,485.26
+ Income	958.50
- Payments	2,213.79
Closing Balance	
12/15/2013	1,229.97
Show Checking Account	
Starting Balance	
11/15/2013	1,962.90
+Income	4,300.00
-Payments	3,690.10
Closing Balance	
12/15/2013	2,572.80
Cash Account	
Starting Balance	
11/15/2013	40.00
Closing Balance	
12/15/2013	40.00
Money Market Savings	
Starting Balance	
11/15/2013	25,031.25
+ Income	0.82
Closing Balance	
12/15/2013	25,032.07
Total Assets	
12/15/2013	28,874.84
Submitted by Ali Hicks	

Support our 2013 Show Sponsors

Platinum

- Edgewood Nursery
- Herald-Tribune Media Group
- Raleigh & Associates
- Stanley Dean State Farm

Gold

- AAA Auto Group
- Burgundy Square Cafe
- Center For Sight
- Daiquiri Deck
- Dr. Frederick Bloom
- Drs. Davis & Beyer, DDS
- Happy Puppy Pet Spa
- The Ramada Venice
- Silverstein Institute
- Jacaranda Trace Retirement Community

Silver

- Valenti's Allegro Bistro
- Scottie's Dawghouse And Catering Co.

Venice Area Orchid Society News

P.O. Box 443, Venice, FL 34284-0443

- Published monthly.
- Deadline for submissions is the 15th of the prior month.
- Please direct comments to:
Steve Vogelhaupt, csec@vaos.org
- Written submissions are appreciated.

Warning: Endangered Species – Our Local Orchid Growers

We're all familiar with the plight of the Florida panther, the gopher tortoise, the bald eagle and many other species that are teetering on the edge of extinction for a wide variety of reasons. In this editorial, I'm suggesting that local orchid growers, not only in Florida, but in the whole United States, are waging a similar battle for survival.

Their businesses and their passion continue to be threatened by international floriculture conglomerates, often government supported, that are flooding our markets with inexpensive orchids, most often from Taiwan and the Netherlands. These orchids are mass-produced by assembly line growers, each specializing in only one aspect of growing, and each caring for the orchids for only 4 to 6 months before passing them to the next grower. The decision on what particular orchid to grow is made in a corporate conference room and is based on the lowest production cost, the least time needed for production, the ease of international shipment and the highest price in the wholesale markets.

Marketing specialists conduct surveys to determine whether blue, purple, magenta or violet is the trend at the moment and that is what's grown, until the next trend comes along. The fact that a particular orchid may be carrying a virus, while regrettable, isn't that important as their orchids are grown to be enjoyed for the holiday, birthday, or other special occasion and then discarded.

Our local growers, both retail and wholesale, on the other hand, are passionate about orchids, not necessarily the business of orchids, and constantly strive to improve the quality of orchids that they sell. They grow the orchids

that they love and sell orchids that are suited for our particular growing environment, are properly named so that we can delve into their genetic background, and aren't dyed exotic blue or green. Our growers have a physical presence and a telephone number and stand behind what they sell. They strive to establish a personal relationship with their customers and are available to give you the benefit of their many years of experience even if you don't buy on that visit. Many provide free classes and all provide a wealth of information on their websites and a number speak at local orchid societies such as ours.

We've all talked about this problem many times and now that we've talked the talk, it's time to walk the walk. We need to walk past the orchids at Publix, Walmart, Home Depot and the "clearance" orchids at Lowe's and take a drive to Honey Bee Nursery, Plantio la Orquidea, Florida SunCoast Orchids, or Palmer Orchids. There we can see unique species and heritage hybrids, and actually find people who know the difference between a vanda and a dendrobium. Support our speakers by buying a plant or two from them! It's all up to us and we only have ourselves to blame if yet more of our growers close their doors.

At our last Growers Clinic, Jimmy Thomas read excerpts from an article in a recent issue of the Wall Street Journal, titled "Orchids – Now on Sale for \$5.48" which is attached as a culture supplement and details the orchid "manufacturing" process in Taiwan.

–Submitted by Steve Vogelhaupt

VAOS Member Plants Needed

The 57th annual Sarasota Orchid Show will be held at the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, 801 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, on January 11-12. Set up is Friday, January 10 from 8am to 2pm. Their theme is "Symphony of Orchids".

WE NEED YOUR BLOOMING PLANTS FOR THE VAOS DISPLAY!

Please bring your blooming plants to our January 8th meeting and allow us to take them up for the show display. Or you may drop off your plants at Carol Wood's house (497-4995) in south Venice or Jim Thomas' house in Nokomis (966-2479) no later than Thursday evening. We will return your plants to you on Monday after the show.

All plants should be cleaned, staked and free of pests. Please mark your name on the pot and ensure the plant name label is secure in the pot.

ALL PLANTS MUST BE PRE-REGISTERED BY EMAIL

Set up cannot be started Friday morning until all plants are registered with the show committee and labels are prepared. Therefore, please pre-register your plants with Carol Wood by emailing her your plant name, bloom size, color and description, no later than 5pm Thursday evening, Jan. 9. ShowChair@vaos.org.

Rich Amos and his team will set up our display at the Sarasota Show starting at 8am Friday morning. Please contact Rich if you would like to work with him and his team to set up our display (552-6723).

Your blooming plants are needed to create a winning display. Please start to prepare them now for the Sarasota show.

–Submitted by Carol Wood



Unusual Orchids At Which to Marvel

Bee orchids are fascinating and beautiful plants that certainly live up to their name: each flower looks like it has a female bee or wasp resting on it. These modified petals also smell like female bees, emitting enticing chemical signals. These remarkable adaptations are in fact an effective deception to lure a real bee to come and mate.

In most bee orchid species the excited male insect

becomes covered in pollen, in turn pollinating the next orchid he visits; a few species, however, are still self-pollinating. These Mediterranean masters of mimicry grow either singly or in small groups in meadows, woodland edges or even by the side of the road.

—Text courtesy of BBC Nature Wildlife



The Bee Orchid

Scientific Name: *Ophrys apifera*

Common Name: Bee Orchid **Habitat:** Europe



The White Egret Orchid

Scientific Name: *Habenaria radiata*

Common Names: White Egret Flower, Fringed Orchid or Sagiso

Habitat: China, Korea & Russia

Have A Question???

Have a question about your orchid? Has my hybrid cross been named? Has my plant been awarded? What's its parentage?

Several VAOS members subscribe to OrchidWiz and will be happy to look it up for you. Email your orchid name and question to one of the following:

Carol Wood: showchair@vaos.org

Jim Thomas: programs@vaos.org

Ted Kellogg: tmkellogg@gmail.com

—Submitted by Carol Wood

Patronize Our Local Growers

- Honey Bee Nursery (941-474-6866)
2383 Englewood Road (Rt. 776),
Englewood, FL
- Palmer Orchids (941-322-1644)
22700 Taylor Dr.,
Myakka City, FL 34251
- Plantio La Orquidea (941-504-7737)
3480 Tallevast Rd,
Sarasota
- Florida SunCoast Orchids (941-322-8777),
8211 Verna Bethany Rd.,
Myakka City, FL

VAOS Show Update (February 1-2, 2014)

Just four more weeks to show time folks! We have a fantastic line up of vendors and expect a great turn out for our show. We still have several open slots where volunteers are needed. We ask all members to volunteer 2-3 hours or more for our major annual fund raising event. Here are the areas where we need your help:

Clerks: Saturday 7:30am to 10:30am. Work with the AOS judges to locate and point out plants in the exhibits, place ribbons and record results. This is a tremendous learning experience as the judges share their knowledge of what makes a winning flower and plant. AOS judges travel from around the country to participate in judging our show and our volunteer clerks are essential to their job. Sixteen (16) more clerks are needed. Committee Chair: Mary Anne Digrazia

Front Door Admissions: Sell admission tickets and hand out programs at the front door. A sit down job. Three (3) more people are needed Saturday afternoon and four (4) more people on Sunday afternoon. Committee Chair: Elaine Ortt

Security: Eleven (12) more volunteers are needed on Saturday and Sunday to monitor exit doors and ensure attendees do not step into displays. A sit down job. Committee Chairs: Bob and Cindy Czarnomski

Hospitality/Kitchen: Five (5) more volunteers are needed to assist with reheating and serving food and clean up. Committee Chairs: Linda and Bruce Hahn

Great Food: Please sign up to bring in your favorite dish on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. Hot or cold main dishes, casseroles, pastries, platters, desserts. We serve the judges, vendors and show volunteers Friday through Sunday and look forward to your tasty dishes! Committee Chairs: Linda & Bruce Hahn

Please plan to attend our January 8th meeting where we will finalize committee volunteer lists and verify t-shirt sizes. If you cannot attend the meeting, please call or email Carol Wood, Show Co-Chair to sign up. (497-4995 or showchair@vaos.org)

If you are unable to volunteer or bring in food please become a show patron by donating \$25 to VAOS. Mail to P.O. Box 443, Venice, FL 34284, and mark your check "Show Patron".

VAOS t-shirts will be distributed to all working volunteers by the committee chairs at the show. Members who volunteer their time, bring food or make a patron donation will not be charged admission at the door. Looking forward to a successful show!

—Submitted by Carol Wood

President's Message (continued from page 1)

the auction so there was strong competition for this one. I'm glad I won it! Thank you to all who participated in the lively auction! Next year we look forward to another

elegant event for the best and largest orchid society on the West coast of Florida!!

VAOS Membership Dues Increase After Jan. 8 Monthly Meeting

The annual dues will increase to \$20 per household effective January 9, 2014. Members who join or renew by bringing their check to the **Jan. 8** meeting may pay the current rate of \$15.00.

Dues must be received by **Jan. 8th** so that you can be included in the 2014 Membership Directory. This is also the time to make sure that we have your current contact information – address, phone and email address. Please check your current Directory to see if your entry needs to be changed. Should this be the case, please notify Jay and Judy Loeffler, Membership Chairs, at memb@vaos.org. Thanks to all who have paid their dues and made corrections.

Please mail your check, payable to VAOS, to:

**Ms. Ali Hicks, Treasurer
P.O. Box 443
Venice, FL 34284-0443**

Another Tailgate Party!!

Thanks to the huge success of the first Tailgate Party in November, we'll have another party on Thursday, January 16, 2014, prior to our Growers Meeting. We'll start at 5:30 p.m. in the south side parking lot of the Venice Community Center and members are asked to bring soft drinks, a chair, and munchies for you and to share. Once again, we'll have a grill if the weather cooperates and we'll move indoors in case of inclement weather.

There is no formal program or presentation, only plenty of time to get acquainted and enjoy the evening. If you missed the first party, this is your chance to see what you missed; if you came to the first party, you'll be chomping at the bit to go again!!

See you there!!

—Submitted by Steve Vogelhaupt





Instructions for Orchid Pre-order from SunCoast Orchids

Send an email to: info@FloridaSunCoastOrchids.com.

Subject: VAOS Preorder

Your name:

Item number (from website):

Description (from website, including pot size):

Quantity:

Price: (from website):

Tel # in case of problems:

Jim Roberts will make adjustment to price, less 10%, when he delivers orchid(s) at Jan 8 meeting and collects payment. Cash or check only please. If you have any questions regarding ordering procedure or website content, please email Jim directly at address above.

Note: The last day for preorders is Thursday, Jan 2, 2014

A Growing Tip from Jay Loeffler

At our Growers Clinic in December, Jay passed out the small black plastic cups shown in the picture below. After multiple hilarious guesses by our members, we learned that the cups are actually fertilizer baskets used to hold Dynamite slow release fertilizer. The fertilizer is ideal for the snowbirds among us who are forced to leave their prized orchids to the summer rains as it furnishes small amounts of a balanced fertilizer whenever it rains. Many of us also use Dynamite fertilizer, wrapped in pantyhose or similar porous fabrics, to provide consistent fertilization for our vandaceous orchids and those that are mounted or in slat baskets.

If you plan to use the Dynamite, make sure that you get the one with the red cap, available only at Home Depot, as it provides balanced nutrients and consistent release. The baskets are only available on Ebay and the Thai vendor indicates that only limited quantities are available. I've ordered one lot of 100 medium baskets costing \$28.00 total, including shipment, and will have them available in 10 pot increments for \$2.80 when they arrive in mid-January. Contact me at csec@vaos.org if interested

Thanks for sharing your tip with us, Jay!

—Submitted by Steve Vogelhaupt

Do you have website maintenance experience?

Can you contribute 2-3 hours a month?

Your society needs a member with experience in web-site development/maintenance to help us maintain and update our WordPress-based website. Please contact Ted Kellogg, VAOS Webmaster, at tmkellogg@gmail.com for more information or to volunteer.

VAOS 2014 Volunteers Needed

At our March 2014 meeting we will elect new officers and celebrate and thank retiring officers and volunteers. After many years, Charlie and Margaret Cullen are ready to turn over the Raffle Table to new volunteers. This involves setting up the table at each meeting, selling tickets and conducting the raffle at the end of the meeting. Also, Jerry Manegold, who has been our talented Tech Guy for several years, is looking for his successor. This job involves setting up the VAOS lap top computer and projector for the speaker at meetings, assisting the speaker to load his presentation, and operating lights and sound during the program. Please contact Judy Loeffler or Carol Wood on the Nominating Committee for more information or to volunteer.

Venice Area Orchid Society News

P.O. Box 443
Venice, FL 34284-0443

Next Meeting:

Wednesday, January 8, 7:00 p.m.

- **Speaker:** Jim Roberts
- **Topic:** "A Few Encyclias to Enjoy"
- Show table entries welcome
- Bring plants for the Raffle Table
- Bring treats to share

Upcoming Events

January 8:

VAOS monthly Meeting 7pm. Venice Community Center 326 S. Nokomis Ave., Venice, FL. Speaker: Jim Roberts, Florida SunCoast Orchids. Topic: A Few Encyclias to Enjoy

January 11-12:

Sarasota Orchid Show, Saturday 9am-5pm and Sunday 10am-5pm. Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, 801 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL. Info: www.sarasotaorchidsociety.org. Bring blooming orchids to our Jan. 8th meeting for us to take to the SOS show for the VAOS display. Pre-register all plants for show **before** Thursday 1/9 by emailing Carol Wood the name of your plant, color and size.

January 16:

VAOS Growers Clinic. 7pm, Venice Community Center. Topic: Cattleyas 101. Bring your problem plants for expert advice. Join us for the tailgate

party in the VCC parking lot at 5:30pm before the Growers Clinic.

January 17-19:

Ft. Lauderdale Orchid Society Show & Sale. Info: www.flos.org.

January 25-26:

Tamiami International Orchid Festival, Miami-Dade Fair & Expo Center, Miami. Info: tamiamiorchidfestival.com. Sarasota Orchid Society will have a bus trip to the festival and invites VAOS members to participate. Cost is approx. \$35. Contact Jimmy Thomas at 966-2479 or programs@vaos.org if interested or for further info.

January 25-26:

Manatee River Orchid Society Show, Bradenton Municipal Auditorium, 1005 Barcarrota Blvd., Bradenton, FL. Info: www.manateeriverorchid-society.com.

January 31:

VAOS Annual Show set up at Venice

Community Center 1pm to 6pm.

February 1-2:

VAOS Annual Show & Sale: Saturday: 10am to 5pm (displays open at 11am) Sunday: 10am to 4pm.

Planning Ahead:

February 5:

VAOS monthly Meeting 7pm. Venice Community Center 326 S. Nokomis Ave., Venice.

March 22:

VAOS Beach Party Cookout, Details to follow.

Ongoing:

Mentor Program: help for beginning growers, contact Peg Fahrenback, rsec@vaos.org.

Orchid Judging takes place at the **Christ the King Catholic Church** – McLoughlin Center, Room C, 821 S. Dale Mabry Hwy., Tampa, FL 33609 at 6:30pm on the fourth Wednesday of every month.

Info: www.fncjc.shutterfly.com

~More orchid show listings can be found on the American Orchid Society site, www.aos.org; Events page~

Reverse Osmosis(RO) Systems

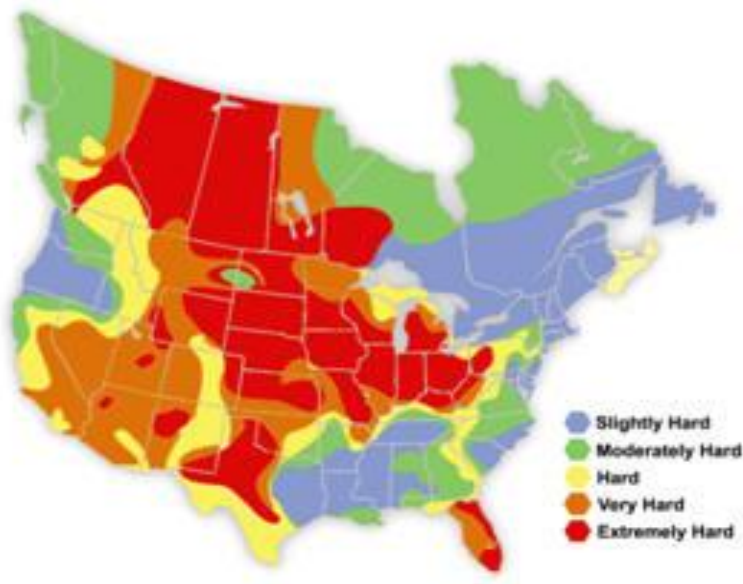
We believe that clean water is the next "oil" in the global economy, and is a resource that should not be utilized in an unthinking and arbitrary manner. Effective immediately, all First Rays Grower's and Counter-Top RO systems will be constructed to take advantage of an improved pure-to-flush ratio. Even though orchid growers are an ingenious group, utilizing that flush water for other plants, humidification, etc., we felt that reducing its production by about a third or more was worth doing.

Culture Notes:

While on the subject of water purification, I want to address a number of fairly common questions about water supplies, with a bit of my own "twist" thrown in. (With this, by the way, you are getting an early peek at an article that is scheduled to be published early next year in the American Orchid Society's *Orchids* magazine.)

Whenever I analyze aspects of my own culture, I start by assessing the conditions the plants are likely to see in the wild, and compare those to the level of "abuse" I give them in captivity. In the forests and savannahs in which our plants originate, their water sources are rain, fog, or dew. In all cases, the liquid condenses from water vapor in the air, making them, in essence, nature's version of distilled water. Rain that cascades down through the forest canopy picks up and carries nutrients to the orchids, but they tend to be in very small concentrations – on the order of 10-25 parts per million (ppm) of total dissolve solids (TDS). It seems logical, therefore, to assume that orchids have evolved to thrive in the environment of pure water and minimal food supplies, and that exposing them to other than that could be counter-productive, if not downright detrimental to their health. Indeed, "hard" water - that with lots of dissolved solids - can give our plants a really dull appearance, not only due to those minerals coating the leaves, but because those dissolved minerals can interfere with the plants' physiological processes as well, and when fertilizer is added to it, the mineral concentration can be high enough to be physically damaging.

A great many commercial growers swear by the use of pure water in their irrigation and feeding regimens, and some growers claim that it is especially important for the successful culture of cool-growing, high-altitude species, many of whom spend their natural lives almost constantly dripping from the fog that routinely envelops them. According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), almost 90% of US homes have water that can be considered to be at least slightly hard, with Canada following closely behind at about 85%.



A word of caution - don't rely entirely on this map to assess your water quality; the treatment and selection of specific sources of water can have a significant effect on it. For example, while parts of Colorado appear to have very hard ground water according to the map, many municipalities rely heavily on snow melt for their drinking water supply, and that is very pure. Likewise, New York City, whose water originates in wilderness watersheds, has some of the purest water around! The best thing you can do is ask your local water authority or have it tested.

Even though my well water is considered to be only “moderately hard”, being a bit of a “control freak” when it comes to my orchids, I prefer to use pure water and provide all mineral nutrients with my fertilizer, so that I know exactly what they are getting, without being at the “whims” of nature.

There are a number of potential sources of pure water, so one must consider factors such as cost, availability, ease of use, and environmental impact when deciding which way is best for them. Collected rainwater (or melted snow) is probably the least expensive source of pure water, but requires adequate storage capacity to carry you through dry spells or warmer seasons, and if you live in an urban or industrialized area, the air quality may render it less pure than we – or our plants - would like.

Air conditioner or dehumidifier condensate is again, a free, "distilled" source, but instead of waiting for nature to condense the moisture from the air as rain, we use a refrigerant to chill the air and force the condensation. This is a limited-volume source that is best utilized in warm, humid climates, but still needs tanks to store it, as most units only produce a trickle. Some warn against using these sources, as phytotoxic aluminum might be extracted from the heat exchanger “fins” (I have never heard of that being an issue, but forewarned is forearmed).

Distilled water is the purest possible, and is produced by heating water to its boiling point so that it evaporates, leaving all of the dissolved solids behind, then cooling, condensing, and collecting that pure water for use. Many grocery- and drug stores sell distilled water, but lugging it home can be a nuisance, and over time – especially with larger collections – can become quite costly. Some folks have their own “stills”, but they can be quite expensive to purchase, and unless solar-powered, they can be expensive to operate, and in any case will also require storage containers.

Deionized (DI) water is second only to distilled in terms of purity, and is produced by passing water through cylinders containing a variety of organic resins that extract and trap the dissolved mineral ions. If sized properly, these can be "on-demand" systems that are installed in-line with your plumbing to purify and supply the water as it is needed. Unfortunately, even though there typically is no need to purchase any equipment, and the on-demand pure water supply is very convenient, as the resin beds need to be recharged or replaced periodically by a professional – the harder your water, the more frequently - this can become quite costly.

Reverse Osmosis (RO) is the most common method of purifying water used by orchid growers. In an RO system, water is purified by passing it through a membrane having pores so small that they allow water molecules to pass while blocking as much as 99% of the dissolved ions. Like distilled, RO water can sometimes be purchased in stores, but having your own reverse osmosis system is usually the most cost-effective way of producing pure water - typically only a few pennies per gallon. Be aware that a residential system typically only delivers a few ounces per minute of pure water, necessitating some sort of storage tank for periodic irrigation with larger volumes, but they are usually set up to refill tanks automatically, so you always have a ready supply. Reverse osmosis systems also have a secondary water outlet – the “flush” water that carries away the rejected dissolved solids. Until recently, standard systems consumed four gallons of water to produce one gallon of pure, with the other three being the flush water. Most folks use that flush water for less-sensitive plants, let it trickle on the greenhouse floor for humidification, or as in my own case, use it to refill an artificial pond outside the greenhouse, used by frogs and the local population of wild animals. If you pay for water and/or sewer fees based upon your consumption, that can increase the costs somewhat, but modern systems use technology to reduce that ratio significantly.

Until next time...

Good Growing!

Courtesy of Roy Barkalow, First Rays LLC.

The Precious Orchid – Now on Sale for \$5.48

Taiwan's Efficient Growers, Who Copied Tech Industry, Bemoan Days When a Flower Fetched \$100,000

By Eva Dou

WUSHU VILLAGE, Taiwan- A custard-yellow orchid dubbed P. Golden Emperor 'Sweet' changed hands between Taiwan breeders in 1978 for \$100,000. Now, orchids roll out of greenhouses in Taiwan and onto the shelves of big-box retailers like Lowe's for as little as \$5.48.

As with flat-panel televisions and laptop computers, the once-rare orchid has become a mass-market commodity. Orchids are now the best-selling potted flower in the U.S., with annual sales exceeding the poinsettia, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Behind the shift are the entrepreneurs of Taiwan, who have brought to orchid-breeding the energy and methods applied to making consumer electronics.

One result is familiar to many electronics makers: While global orchid sales are rising, profit margins are thinning.

"An orchid is no longer worth what it used to be," said Wu Po-Hung, one of Taiwan's largest orchid growers. "We learned how to grow them too well."

Greenhouses rise from the humid plains of southern Tainan County in clusters that bring together dozens of small growers. Each specializes in a specific stage of the production cycle-from germination to potting plants. Together they form an intricate orchid-production chain that can produce orchids to meet client specifications. Its efficiency resembles the assembly lines of Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., the Taiwanese contractor that makes iPhones and other Apple Inc. products.

Overall, since the U.S. first permitted imports of Taiwanese potted orchids in 2004, the wholesale value of a large potted orchid in the U.S. has dropped around 30%, with inflation factored in, according to figures from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Smaller orchid plants now wholesale for as little as 100 New Taiwan dollars (\$3.33), said Mr. Wu.

It is a reversal for Mr. Wu, whose family originally grew orchids on their rooftops as a hobby. His father turned it into a business after discovering he could make more money selling collectors his orchids on weekends than in his day job as an airplane mechanic.

A market for rare orchids still exists. But that has been on decline since the mid-20th century when horticulturalists figured out how to clone orchids from tissue cells. For centuries prior, growing orchids was something of a mystery. Their dust-like seeds would sprout only if they landed on a particular type of fungus. They grew best clinging to trees or rocks, instead of dirt, in the jungles of Southeast Asia and South America.

The ancient Greeks saw the orchid as the incarnation of a nymph's lustful son who had tried to rape a priestess. In Victorian Europe, orchid hunters hired by wealthy collectors sometimes killed each other in pursuit of new breeds-the subject of Susan Orlean's book on orchid history, "The Orchid Thief". Disliking its often ostentatious collectors, American author James Agee wrote in 1935 that the orchid was "the Largest, the Loudest, the Most Expensive, the most supercharged with Eroticism, Glamor, Prestige."

The contemporary orchid-breeding business in Taiwan and its main rival, the Netherlands, centers on the Phalaenopsis, or the moth orchid. Native to Taiwan, it is popular with overseas customers for its full petals in pink, purple, white and yellow.

In the 1980's, a government-owned sugar company started growing orchids and found it more profitable than its core business. A decade ago, the Taiwan government plowed under huge swaths of unprofitable sugar cane to build greenhouses for orchids. Following the tech industry model, the small growers grouped together into production chains.

Some growers focus on new breeds, coaxing cloned orchid cells into tiny green curls floating in glass flasks. Others then raise the slow-growing seedlings, packing them with dry moss into flexible plastic pots. The seedlings go through three growth stages of 4 to 6 months each, usually under the care of different growers, and are repacked each time into successively larger pots. Then they are shipped overseas. At a greenhouse in the U.S., a shock of cold jolts the plants into flowering. Then they go to the most profitable stage: end-user sales.

The process has allowed Taiwan to become the world's largest producer of orchids by shipment number (the Netherlands is actually the largest producer by revenue) while capturing only a fraction of the profits. It is a ceiling Taiwanese companies have hit repeatedly: from laptop computers to power wheelchairs and golf club heads. "Taiwan's orchid growers can't do much except keep trying to cut costs lower to stay ahead", said Ting-Fang Hsieh, director of Taiwan's government-run Floriculture Research Center.

Taiwanese growers bemoan that they ship more orchids than the Netherlands, but the Dutch manage to make more money off orchids. A major Dutch competitor, Floriculture BV, has built its own greenhouses in the U.S., which means it can control the more lucrative sales to retailers. Though Taiwan has some industrial-scale production, most of the business is dominated by small family-run shops that focus on a single step. That, to some, is sapping profitability.

While generally it takes one to two years to grow an orchid, "most Taiwanese growers keep the plants for only a six-month segment", said Mr. Wu, the Wushu Village grower. The strategy, he says, limits investment risk but also means Taiwanese growers can't control sales overseas.

Some growers are experimenting. Nadison Hsu, the 43-year-old chairman of Taiwan's largest orchid-growing collective and an ex-government official who favors pink and green Hawaiian shirts, said the industry needs to consolidate and innovate to succeed. His company, Taiwan Orchid Professionals, began selling a brand of orchid-infused

beauty products in Asia. It is also selling gold-coated orchids as a gimmick to build the brand. The company became the first horticultural company to list on Taiwan's over-the-counter Gre Tai Securities Market this year, a precursor step to listing on the Taiwan Stock Exchange.

Showing off a large orchid plant with seven spotless white blooms cascading down a central stem, Mr. Hsu pointed to the four pairs of green leaves, which show that the plant had taken four years to reach that size.

"How much do you think we can sell this for?" he says. "Just 250 New Taiwan dollars" - \$8.30.

Jimmy Thomas provided the article from the October 17, 2013 edition of the Wall Street Journal.