



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Autumn is Here – Prepare for Winter

by Mike Heinz

October, 2009 Keiki Club Presentation

As the days shorten and the temperatures drop those of us that grow all, or some, of our plants outside are faced once again with the problem of bringing our plants inside for the winter. The first problem, whether we like it or not, is that there are more plants outside than we put out there in the spring. No matter what we tell ourselves when we start each new growing season, about not having any more room, we still manage to squeeze one (or twenty) more plants into the space we have. Now we have to squeeze those same plants into our winter growing area, which did not get any larger over the summer. This causes for some very creative thinking, and making superb use of the little space we have.

- Get some tiered benches that allow you to go up, as well as back. These can be made out of strong fence wire with side braces, or wood planks on top of pots or bricks.
- Next, reduce your inventory, give that division to somebody that admired it during the meeting when you put it on the show table. Now it's their problem of how to winter it.
- Plants that can be re potted in the late summer, or early fall should be looked at closely, a plant in a 8" pot might divide into two 4" pots, and fit on the shelf better.

OK we've got the area set up, the spouse has been convinced that this new idea/area will work, and we're ready to start the move. Not so fast!

- Is the area you're going to use going to be damaged by the excess moisture you're going to adding when you water/mist your plants? Wall board will not stand up to the constant barrage of moisture. Maybe the back patio can be enclosed with plastic, or the pool enclosure can be used. Back porches have been turned into winter greenhouses in more than one household.
- Will there be enough light for your plants, the light we need to see, and enjoy our plant, is not enough for them to grow well. A trip to Lowes, or the local hardware store might be in order to get one, or more, four foot florescent light strips. You'll have to decide what plant needs to go closest to the light to receive the right amount of light.

We also want to make sure that we are only bringing in our plants, and not critters that abound in Florida. In my area, it's not uncommon to find a green, or black snake curled up in a pot, or basket, and although they aren't a problem to the plant, they can be a real problem to the person they drop on from the basket hung high in the growing area. We also have a huge crop of banana bugs/ palmetto bugs, and these are a real problem to us, since they love the nice tender new growths on our plants. Spiders in the growing area a



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good thing to keep the bug population under control, but some of us have an aversion to our eight legged (friends?).

Most of the scale and mealy bug problems you might have in an enclosed growing area are not a problem outside, so a quick inspection should be all that's necessary to prove they are not present. While you're inspecting them, take the opportunity to clean up your plants, remove dead flower spikes, etc. You might even spray them with the garden hose to give them a bath and remove any spider webs, etc. If you do find any pesky critters, you can treat small spots with rubbing alcohol or spray all the plant surfaces with Orthene, Malathion or something similar.

Now we get to look at the plants we have. What is the best temperature to bring each plant inside? This is a question you can address with other growers. Cattleyas can stay out longer than the vandas, nobile dendrobiums can stay out longer than phalaenopsis type dendrobiums. Each plant has a minimum temperature that it can withstand, and must be protected from anything lower than that. All of them must be protected from any temperature below freezing.

Enjoy having your plants where you can tend for them, and make the mandatory resolution that you will not add any more plants next year, no matter what, because you absolutely have no more space for even one more plant. The rest of us will laugh, or at least smile, because we're no better at keeping that resolution than you are.