

Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

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Since moving to Florida in 2001, I have missed my Sunday morning excursions to my basement greenhouse where I had maintained nearly 100 phals in a light garden environment for several years. It was very normal for me to have 40-50 blooming at one time or another from spring through summer. When I moved to Florida, I brought 15-16 plants with me, most of which I killed by too much care or improper care. I do have a very special cattleya with the tag missing that has been divided and that I have rebloomed sporadically. In 2007, I attended the Jax spring show, bought 6 phals and got hooked all over again. In the spring of 2008 I attended and later joined the SAOS. Naturally, I began collecting again and have settled on catts and other more bright light alliances to gather and nurture.

I grow on a covered porch that has an east/southeast exposure with full sun beginning at sunup and lasting until noon. My plants (now numbering about 40) are placed on humidity trays or open shelving with large flat plastic trays below to catch run through. All watering is done from premixed solutions poured from gallon jugs, tedious but less messy. I try very hard to keep the overflow to a minimum when watering due to the really ugly color of Inoculaid and Orchid Pro. Because of this, I have very few plants hanging. Drainage is one reason and reduced light would be the other. The higher I hang them, the less light they receive.



After several visits to Bottom Gardens and checking out The Oleander Tree, I started moving a very few plants into hanging pots or mounts and hanging them in my south facing (small) Live Oak Tree. That worked very well, so I bought more....DUH! These plants are watered with a hose and fed by immersion in a bucket of runoff from the porch. (I should note that all of my runoff is used to water houseplants and/or blooming plants around the house foundation).

I recently was faced with a small dilemma regarding my small hanging collection. I had made plans to have a surgical process that might keep me in the hospital for as much as 14 days. After visiting Bottom Gardens for a Keiki Club meeting and seeing the awning style shade areas that Terry had created, I decided I needed something like that to make it easier for my wife (a non-gardener) to care for things while I was away. I had a 12-13 ft wall that faced southeast that seemed like a natural location. But I was concerned about attachment to the house and local community rules within our gated community. Then, Voila! On a tour through the Home Depot garden area I found rolls of shade cloth in 3 different colors. I hesitated to buy without having a plan so back home I went. After a brief survey, it appeared that my AC compressor

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screened area might offer a solution. I made a couple sketches, got the wife's approval and went shopping.



I bought a 6 ft x 25 ft roll of 70% shading which is more than I was looking for but it was there and ready to use. They also had snap on clips. The material is of a non-tearing nature which allows cutting. I bought 2" PVC pipe and made a framework by setting poles down inside the 4 x 4 posts. I made it as tall as I could without obstructing a window. The material is fastened to the PVC frame with the purchased clips, cable ties and bungee cords. All of the PVC is loose fit so it can

be disassembled easily and quickly. Plants are hung on a hurriedly scavenged 2 x 4 with hook eyes (I will refine that soon). I finished this little project 2 days before my hospital visit. According to my light meter I am in the 3000-4000 ft candle range, the area is 5 x 8 ft and the cost was about \$90.



The area is in full sun from sunup until about noon. As the heat picks up I can move the plants more toward the house wall and reduce sun exposure. It seems that I may be able to accommodate 25-30 plants in the area without obstructing air flow to the compressor. I have a hose nearby and simply spray every 3-4 days depending on weather conditions. Every other week I hand pour or dip fertilizer. I am still experimenting but I am very happy with the results. The Cattleyas are spiking

and one of the Dendrobiums has 2 spikes and nearly 25 blooms. There are also 2 vanda/asco types with many new roots and new growths at the top. All in all, this little project has worked out very well and will only hurt my budget.