



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Spring into Action

Orchids are Awakening and Entering the Prime Growing Season

by Sue Bottom

The dull, gray, cold days of winter are behind us. It's warm, it's bright and new green orchid root tips are growing. It's time for you to spring into action!

Move Plants to Their Summer Home – Sometime after mid-March, it should be safe to move your plants from their winter to their summer homes. The plants may have been in a less than optimum situation during the winter while you were keeping them alive, perhaps too crowded, too cold, too shady or too dry. Never fear, they will regain their growing vigor when they are outside in the fresh air with enough sun and water.

- *Acclimate Plants to Increased Light* – Move your plants into higher intensity light gradually to avoid sunburn, transitioning them for gradually for 2 or so weeks until they are in their ideal spot. The amount of light your plants receive increases in the spring, both from the changing location of the sun and from number of hours the sun is out. Keep an eye out for potential sunburn on leaves and shade plants when necessary. If you notice that those nearest your light source are getting yellowish, make sure that they are not burning. Thin leaved orchids such as oncidiums and dendrobiums will show the problem first; most cattleyas will turn yellowish or show reddish shadows on their leaves.
- *Vary Your Watering Schedule* - With up-and-down temperatures, cloudy days and unpredictable weather, spring is a very hard time for orchid growers. Match your watering schedule to the weather. If the temperatures are warm and the sun is out, water as you do during summer. If the days stay cool and cloudy, then revert back to your winter schedule. Watch your plants carefully and check how damp the pots are. When everything feels dry, wait a day or two and then water.
- *Stake your plants* - Since orchids grow so slowly it is just our nature to leave them in one place and very often they will start tilting in the direction of the most light. We need to stake our plants (particularly dendrobiums and cattleyas) so that they will grow in an upright fashion to present their flowers aesthetically. Dendrobiums in particular will lean over without proper staking. Use stakes that are the same height as the tallest growth and tie or clip two or three times the full length of the stake.
- *Turn Your Plants* - In addition to staking your plants, turn them one quarter of the way around each week if you are growing in a windowsill or with the light source on one side. This will allow the plant to grow more evenly and keep it from leaning in one direction. The exception to this rule is when the plant is producing an inflorescence or flowering stem. You want to stake the inflorescence, but do not turn the plant or you will ruin the presentation of your flowers.



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The Annual Repotting Marathon – Get ready for the repotting season. Sterilize your pots ahead of time. Make sure you have enough potting mix to finish your repotting chores before the suppliers sell out of your ingredients. Select your potting mix to match your watering habits so orchids in a given area can be watered with the same frequency. If you've purchased orchids that are in different mixes you may want to repot them into the same mix so you can deliver the right amount of water and fertilizer to each plant. Coarse, freely draining mixes are generally better for the cattleyas and dendrobiums that have pseudobulbs or canes to store energy and water. More water retentive mixes like coco husk or sphagnum moss are better for the phalaenopsis and paphiopedilums that just have fleshy leaves to store their energy. Oncidiums seem to thrive in either mix. Check out Greg Allikas' [Potting Workshop](#) for some great instructions on repotting a wide variety of different orchids.

- *Cattleyas* – The best time to repot cattleyas is right before they send out new root tips. You'll see a swelling on the youngest pseudobulb that will signal the beginning of the repotting season. Your unifoliate cattleyas will be ready for repotting first and the bifoliate a little bit later. If you're growing outdoors, select a tree fern/aliflor type open mix, so the roots will have the air they love so much around them. Remove the old growth leaving at least 3 to 5 pseudobulbs and select a pot that will allow the plant enough room to grow for 2 to 3 years (look at the distance between pseudobulbs and assume you'll get 1 to 3 new growths each year). Use a rhizome clip to anchor the plant until the new roots are established.
- *Dendrobiums* – In general, dendrobiums resent repotting and being overpotted. The canes tend to grow very close together so several years of new growth can be accommodated in a smaller pot than you might select for a cattleya. They tend to like lots of water during the growing season and lesser amounts during the winter rest, so the mix should not contain too much degradable organic matter (like coco husk, sphagnum or bark).
- *Oncidiums* – Oncidiums can be repotted at any time though it is best to repot right before new root growth begins. Oncidiums are happy in a variety of mixes depending on your watering habits and growing conditions.
- *Paphiopedilums* – Paphiopedilums love to be repotted, perhaps because they are so sensitive to salt accumulation in the mix. They can be repotted every 6 months if you are so inclined. Jim Krull recommends a mix of 90% fine bark, 5% charcoal and 5% peat for most paphs, using half coarse bark for 6 in and larger pots.
- *Phalaenopsis* – Phalaenopsis should be repotted every year after flowering. The commercial growers all seem to favor sphagnum moss, which is great as long as



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you allow it to dry slightly between watering. If you are growing outdoors or are a heavy waterer, perhaps a coco husk mix would be preferable.

- *Catasetum Relatives* –Watch for signs of new growth on the *catasetum* relatives. Remove the old medium, cut off dried roots and pot in a sphagnum moss or coco husk mix interlayered with the time released fertilizer Dynamite but DO NOT WATER until the new growth is about 4 inches tall.

That River in Egypt - Inspect your plants and note any that do not appear to be vibrant and happy. If the plant is not growing well for you, try a different regimen. Perhaps the plant would prefer a more water retentive or more freely draining potting medium or try mounting the plant and see if that works better. Perhaps the plant is growing but will not bloom for you. Try relocating the plant so it receives more light (gradually so a sudden increase in light won't sunburn the leaves). If you've tried everything, consider giving the plant to someone with a different shade green thumb to see if their conditions suit the plant better. And if all else fails, send the plant to orchid heaven to make room for plants that you can flower and enjoy more.