



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Understanding Bud Blast

by Eric Milstrey, ericmsaos@gmail.com

Bud blast—the premature loss or drop of a flower bud before it opens—is a disappointing issue often caused by a combination of environmental stresses:

- ★ Watering Issues: Both overwatering and underwatering can trigger blast. Underwatering causes the plant to draw moisture away from the buds to survive. Overwatering damages the root system, preventing the plant from transporting water up to the developing buds.
- ★ Water trapped around fragile buds, such as inside a splitting Cattleya sheath, can encourage bacterial or fungal rot.
- ★ Sudden drops in relative humidity can damage buds, usually at the tip.
- ★ Temperature Fluctuations: Dramatic temperature shifts—such as moving plants between outdoors, the greenhouses and into the home—are major triggers. Drafts (hot or cold) and brief exposures to extreme temperatures can easily cause buds to abort, as happened after opening the greenhouse one frosty day last January.
- ★ Lighting: A significant decrease in light levels can lead to aborted buds.
- ★ External Contaminants and Pests: Insect infestations, chemical pesticides, and noxious gases (including ethylene from ripening fruit or methane) can induce blast.

Bringing a blooming plant indoors often exposes it to several of these stressors simultaneously. To minimize the risk of bud blast, take care when altering a plant's environment, especially while buds are forming. Additionally, keep detailed records of any plants that experienced bud blast so you can adjust your care routine and prevent repeating the loss again.

This article was adapted from Susan Jones's article in the July 2003 issue of Orchids (Orchids 72:7, pp. 498-499) as well as from personal experience.

