

FROM SANITY TO MADNESS

by Czes Rudak

I had been interested in orchids for many years but never had the time to get involved. It was back in the 80's, I went to a Home Show and came across green houses on display and saw this 10' x 10' and thought it would be the ants pants for a few plants.

It all started with this small 10'x10'green house. I went and bought a few flowering size orchid plants and some ferns just to make it look like a green house and found that I had a few empty spaces so I bought some more orchids until the ferns had to be moved out. The majority of my plants in those early stages came from McKinney's Nursery. I, like a lot of others when bitten by the ORCHID BUG, had to have it. Good, bad or indifferent it didn't matter; there was no such thing as a bad orchid. The first shade house filled very quickly so I bought another one, 15' x 20'. I put the two together and thought, "I'm right now, all this room!" 24 months later there wasn't enough room to swing a cat what do I do?

There were catts etc on the benches, hardcane dens, softcanes and vandas hanging from the rooftops, and paphs under the benches all under the one roof. Nothing was growing properly, they were over crowded and so I had to make a decision, either give it away or make a bigger house. The house was only supposed to be up to the doorway that is now in the middle. I made up all the frames from galvanised pipe, like always I made too many, just like when I go fishing I always buy too much bait. After I had finished putting up the frames to the size I wanted I still had spare frames laying around the yard; they became a real pain mowing around them. I thought the best thing to do was to put them up; the question was do I still only want half the house or the full one hundred foot long. I ended up covering the whole area so it is now 100' x 34' which includes the 15' x 20' shade house attached to the end. The whole thing was designed and constructed by myself and put up with the help of my family. The intention was to build a house half the size that I did. (IF ONLY)



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achieving this.

When I constructed this house I wanted a large open area without centre poles that you see in most other shade houses of this size, by putting the framework in tension I did end up

It has been up for 10 years now and has withstood a few major thunderstorms with no sign of letting go; FINGERS CROSSED. I have 70% green shade cloth over the entire house. I would have preferred to have used 50% black on the sides and 80% to 90% white on the roof as I think this would have had the advantage of additional shade during the hot summer days and taken advantage of reflected light during the winter months. Because of the difficulty in making the cover up in one single sleeve due to the different stretch rates between the different coloured cloth and shade percentages I finally gave up on the white and settled for the above. (I should have used 70% black in hind sight)

Oh what a sight. So many empty benches but it didn't take long to fill them; I don't know how many plants I have, but it must be quite a lot. I now had to get to the practice of how to grow them properly. I joined a number of societies; nobody wanted to tell you how they grew their orchids. I tried all the various mediums bark & charcoal, bark & perlite etc by trial and error until I decided that the Tasmanian Export grade of



Sphagnum worked the best for me. The initial cost wasn't cheap but I saved on water, fertilizers and time, compared to bark mixes or peat & perlite at 8 or 10:1 mixes you could be watering two or three times a week, fertilizing once a week or once a fortnight while in the same months of the year with the sphag you can last for up to two weeks and still be damp, and have fertilizer in your pots up to a month or more. You would think that the roots would rot but they don't for some unknown reason. The roots will only die back on the back bulbs, but that's normal even in other mediums unless you back cut your plants. Because it is impossible to buy the good quality Tasmanian sphag. here in Ipswich my mates and I who used sphag intensely have had to change over to peat & perlite.

About seven years ago I was already looking for an alternative medium and came across this peat & perlite mix when I visited Margaret Tierney's place. She had beautiful plants of Phalaenopsis growing in it; she may have been the first person in the south east to use this style of potting medium. I asked her where she got the recipe from and to my surprise she gave it to me; I then got onto the perlite companies and asked them for any information that they could supply to me about their product. I received more than I wished for, from this I got the basic mixture put together by the universities in USA, GB, and Holland for the flower trade. They had come up with various formulas for different plants. I used the basic one,



Pot. CRB's Rainbow
Brittny

which consisted of peat, perlite, very coarse sand, blood & bone and dolomite; which was similar to Margaret's recipe. I put some plants into this mix and was quite pleased with the results. I now use a different version of peat, its COCO peat that I buy in the 50 litre bags and mix with the perlite. I have a few catts still in sphag as I continue to change over to COCO peat & perlite, and only use sphag and perlite in my paphs these days. Initially I tried a 8:1 ratio of perlite to peat but the plants did not like it, they shrivelled back quite badly because I couldn't keep the water up to them. It was because the plants were used to being virtually wet all the time in sphag. All of a sudden they were in a dry perlite mix, that is an unforgiving product "perlite". If it is dry and cannot get moisture from anywhere it will take it from the plant. I started to adjust the mix and what I have found now is that 4:1 is the best mix for me, here in the Ipswich area it lasts about 3 days before I need to put the water back into it in summer. Having said that, because of the drought I haven't watered for about two weeks and the plants still look OK. It's October now, so have we been over watering?

Using COCO peat & perlite there's not enough nourishment for the plant so I use a slow release fertilizer. I pot the plants in the medium then sprinkle slow release fertilizer over that and then cover it with 15 mm quartz. The quartz slows down the germination of eucalypt spores that land in the pots and helps keep the weeds in check to a big degree. I believe it also helps to make the fertilizer release its nutrients more evenly through the year by keeping it cooler during the hot summer days.

I spray the oxalis that does germinate in the pots with 2ml of Roundup and 2ml of Simazine to 1 litre of water. I have found that it does not seem to hurt the catts, paphs, or soft-canes but does affect Australian natives and some other genera. (Editor's Note: If you wish to try this choose a plant that you do not mind losing until you are confident that it works for you). I spray with Lorsban for ants and Supracide twice a year to control other insects. Both these chemicals have a high toxicity level. (Editor's Note: QOS does not recommend the use of any chemicals other than as per the manufacturer's directions and in accordance with state laws.) The shade-cloth on this house is set into a locking channel all the way around the bottom so the whole of the house is well sealed. I do very little fertilizing, in Spring I give them a spray of high nitrogen to get them moving and then in February give them a spray of blossom booster as well. Then a 4-month blossom booster as a slow release. Apart from that I rely on the 12-month slow release fertilizer. {That's because I'm a lazy Gardener}

I re-pot to keep the plants looking tidy and neat and try to get at least 18-24 months from a newly re-potted plant. With the amount of catts I have here I am continually cutting up plants and re-potting. If the plants go over between re-potting I don't worry about topping up the slow release fertilizer. Between my friends and myself we have experimented with variations in the duration of applying fertilizer and found that it isn't critical and makes very little difference to the performance of a mature plant. When I cut up my plants and re-pot them I tie the pseudobulbs up to train the growth to grow upright and look tidy. I pride myself on the way I grow my catts. I think a nice healthy looking plant growing neatly is as important as the flowers. Let's face it for about 9-11 months of the year all we are looking at are leaves on the large catts. I hate the lazy plants like Sylvia Fry with pseudobulbs that lay down. I try to get my plants to grow upright; they look so much better. I also believe that the leaves being more upright in the summer months, do not get burnt as much. Because my roof line runs from 12'apex to 8'sides and over 16'facing north and a further 13'facing north from 10'to 7'it's a split level.

I had enjoyed growing orchids but after 25 years and as good a collection one gets, one can get a little bored and loses some interest, but there is a way of getting one's interest back, by starting on hybridizing and flasking and have a chance of getting something new. It is marvelous how you can be rejuvenated. I began doing my own breeding and like anyone else you look for the best flowers that you could use in the hybridizing so I spoke to my friend Ron Greinke to see if he would be interested in getting involved with me in a breeding program, as he had a good collection of orchids and he agreed to be involved. Ron and I first got together because we recognized that to get the best out of our crosses we had to flower out the numbers to get the good orchid. Hence the need for the other 2B's Bruce Truloff and Bradley Goosetrey who also had good orchids. This was the start of the CRB's registered orchid name. Czes, Ron, Bruce, and Bradley. Now we could really start on a breeding program with the potential of good results having such a collection of good orchid flowers to breed with. The purchase of plants from David Littman's collection which was sold all over Australia after he passed away added strength to our collections and hybridizing. These plants were some of the best breeding and show plants available. David had a real appreciation of seeing the potential in plants. Some of the plants we bought may not have been show winners but have proved themselves in hybridizing.



*Slc. CRB's Elegance
'Greg - R'*

Working together rather than going our separate ways we are able to get the best of the crosses. Through flowering a high number of plants helps in identifying the best breeding plants and their strengths and weaknesses.

Our plan of attack was to start with the smaller and intermediate catts so that we had some results within a three year period, and the larger catts would flower within a five year time frame. We have been doing it for about four years now and have had some outstanding results from our minnies and intermediates while waiting for the standards to flower. In the meantime we watch the small ones flower and plan the next generation.

I grow Australian Natives, Vanda, Softcane Dens, Paphiopedilum and mainly Cattleyas. My aim is to grow Paphiopedilum and Cattleyas only.

THIS IS NOT THE END BUT ONLY THE BEGINNING FOR "CRB's".