

Paphiopedilum with Jim McCubbin

My life with orchids began in the late 70's when I bought a Cymbidium for my parents. I thought it looked alright so I went back to McKinney's and bought one for myself, *Cym. Wallara*. I also bought a 9ft by 11ft shade-house, I put my 5 plants in this and foolishly thought it was adequate. Following that I was given some Dens. and a few bits and pieces by friends, this increased the size of my collection and decreased the spare room in the shade house.

McKinney's and Ron Williamson's nursery used to bring in Paphs. from America and England, there were a lot of Radcliffe crosses at the time that were very attractive, I just didn't realise how long they took to grow and flower.

The collection outgrew the small area I had and Rod McKinney at McKinney's Nursery suggested that I join an orchid society which I did, it was then named North Albert District Orchid Society(NADOS). This has now changed to become LADOS (Logan and District Orchid Society). This introduced me to other orchid growers, other genera and it has kept my interest growing. At that time our business was starting to develop and take a lot of time so I pushed the other orchids into the background and just concentrated on acquiring a collection of *Paphiopedilum*. This was a little hard as the business and teenage children took up a lot time but I did join the Queensland Orchid Society and The Australian *Paphiopedilum* Society. Although I didn't always attend their meetings I got their news letters so that allowed me to keep in touch with what was happening.



At the time I started, the advice on culture to new Paph. growers was to pot them in Cymbidium mix and grow them under the bench as they required less light and a more composted mix than the more common *Cattleya*. This is a real good way to kill paphiopedilums. They do need slightly less light but they do need an open mix that allows the water to run through, they don't like soggy type mixes. (With the water problem in south east Queensland at the moment some growers are going back to a Cymbidium type mix to conserve water.)

A couple of shifts later we moved into a house that allowed me to build an orchid house that actually suited me and the *Paphiopedilum* collection. The new orchid house which is about 12metres by 12metres is shaded on one end by a large tree that I would like to remove. Our house provides protection from the westerly winds and the hot afternoon sun. The shade house is also stepped down about 1.8m from the main yard area providing added protection on the western side. About 600mm - 900mm of the wall stands proud of the embankment with another 1.8m to the top of the roof gable. It is fairly open to the eastern and northern compass points allowing good light for a large part of the day.

The shade-cloth over the majority of the orchid house is 70%. Approximately two thirds of the growing area is covered with Solarweave, the rest is just the shade cloth. All the plants seem to grow better under the open area but it is now too difficult to take off all the Solarweave.

At the moment I am using a Aus Gro bark from Mt Gambier in my mix for most of my orchids. They have a small and a mini size. If the pots are only 4inch I would use about 4 measures of small, 1 measure of mini, 1 measure of charcoal and 1 measure of perlite. I mix this up in a camping washing machine which tumbles, it saves my finger nails and mixes it thoroughly. I do this as a damp mix and add half a handful of hoof & horn or blood & bone as well as half a handful of a dolomite. If I'm using 6-7inch pots instead of the 1 measure of mini bark I would use a measure of medium bark. The most important thing is to pot according to the size of the root ball not to the size of the leaves. If you have a big plant with only two roots you put it in a small pot or you will soon have no roots.

At the moment there are not many places in Australia that you can buy exhibition type Paphs. From the early 90's I have made twelve to twenty crosses each year and I try to grow on a flask of each of those. They can be seen in their various sizes in the shade house. Most of the plants coming on now are from my breeding except I will occasionally do a swap or buy something that I really want. From the flask they go into a compot and I use either sphagnum moss or bark and I have not noticed a great deal of difference in the results as long as they are put in a cool shadier spot. I plant them as individuals in the compot not as a clump. They then have a clear plastic bag placed over them. Three stakes around the side of the pot keep the bag clear of the plants a small hole is made in the top to allow some movement of air. This means that after you have deflasked them they will not need to be watered again for about three week. The main thing that kills small plants like this is constantly watering them. With the bag over the top the humidity is retained and the mix is moist but not wet allowing the existing roots to harden up and new ones to form. Since using this method I don't lose a real lot of plants. The root growth determines their progress through the range of pot sizes. I would like to repot every 12 months but it doesn't seem to happen that way.

My cattleyas, vandas and paphiopedilums all grow in the same orchid house and they all get watered and fertilised at the same time. Small seedlings may get an extra watering from time to time. I hand water and water individual pots as I go. It would probably take me two hours, twice a week in Summer and once a week in Winter as a rule of thumb. This gives me a chance to look at the plants individually as I go. I do have the pots lined up and it makes a big saving on water rather just hosing all over the top. Because they are in with the Paphs maybe my Catts. and Vandaceous are not getting ideal treatment. They probably get more shade than they require but they flower reasonably well. Maybe my Catts stay too wet but without realising it I have probably countered this by having a lot of polystyrene foam in the bottom of the pots and I use a larger bark for them. I have never worried about getting water in the axis of the Paph. leaves. As I finish watering I water over the top to make sure the leaves get wet.

Fertiliser has never been anything special with me I've always used whatever I've won at the last orchid show and I usually use it a 1/3 strength of what is recommended Peters Light and Peters Blossom Booster were my preferred fertilisers 8 or 9 years ago. I probably bought some in the late 80's and it lasted right through to 2002 so you can see I don't use huge amounts of it. I fertilise on a weekly basis and am not concerned too much about flushing the pots between applications. I think flushing the pots right through whether it is fertiliser loaded or straight water is beneficial. Just hosing over the top of the plants and wetting only the top of the mix could lead to a build up of salts.

For a long time I have only relied on Supracide twice a year (head ache for three days after use) to control pests in my orchids. Recently I have been using Procide which has really improved the mite control and I rarely see ants although the manufacturers do not claim it controls ants.

When I'm watering if I notice a *Paphiopedilum* with a round soft mark this is an indication of fungal problem (I think *Colletotrichum*) that seems to come out of the blue, so I pull it out and put it aside to treat. Then I'll come back with a small spray and spray around where the outbreak was. For this and treating the affected plant I use an Octave and Mangazeb solution. The Mangazeb is to kill of any fungal spores on plants while the Octave is a systemic fungicide that will treat the active fungal disease within the plant. I cut out the infected area of the plant before spraying.

In regard to setting Paphs up for a show they need to be round and symmetric. I flower about 200 - 250 plants a year and although the majority are very attractive, if subjected to a critical eye somewhere between 50 - 60 will be unaffected by some sort of deformity. They don't call them complex Paphs. for nothing. The main thing you need is a good plant to start with. The spikes need to develop leaning forward slightly so you can pull them back to present the flower correctly for the judges. The petals often need to be pushed back with soft tissue.

Paphs. have the advantage in that if you have a good flowering it will be there for a month or more. Time to get it to a show.

