NZ Odontoglossum Alliance Growers Newsletter



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Message from the Group Facilitator: Allan Watson

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Well its hard to believe the year is half over and the shortest day is behind us. I hope that as we move into those longer daylight hours my solar batteries will recharge.

It is great to see the Odontoglossum Alliance plants receiving a mention in this years OCNZ year book along with a few growers getting various awards. (Well done to those growers)

By now I suspect that like everyone else I am looking forward to the show season starting not only to see the plants on display but to see what's new on the sales tables.

At the risk of sound like a broken record this news letter requires more input than from the few. Even if its only a photo of your setup or of your plants in bloom. All input is appreciated and Alan Locke is happy to help with any edit requirements.

Continue to enjoy growing and participate with input to the NZ Odontoglossum Alliance Growers face book page

Cheers

Allan Watson

Editor's Ramble

What we used to call Odontioda (now Oncidium) has been my favorite orchid group for a great many years but very little new material has been available for the past 20 years. I asked on the Facebook page as to who was still growing them and who might be interested in flasks. While a number wanted the flasks, no-one claimed to be growing them. Several medium to large collections have been lost in recent years including Alf Day's earlier this year and while this collection was dispersed, I would be surprised if much of it will ever be seen again.

The great displays of full shaped Odonts that we used to see at our Winter shows are now only a shadow of what used to be.

I have been setting pods on mine and there is another 6 due to be harvested shortly and hopefully will be available within the next 2 years.

I need you as the reader to tell me what you are doing and share your experiences so that we can all learn. It is falling to lot of just 3 people to contribute to this newsletter and that is just not enough to keep this publication going. This newsletter is being produced by a high school dropout whose teachers considered would never get anywhere, so if I can do it, you all can, so please put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard and show me what you can do—don't forget the pictures —they save a 1000 words!!.

A couple of interesting plants that I have seen this year that look like small Odontiodas are shown below



Expectation of Judging Plants: A view by Allan Watson

We are entering the show season so I felt this might be a worthwhile topic for discussion.

As growers we are often criticize the judging panel for as we perceive their failures to give a plant an award. I confess I fell into this category. In hind sight my thoughts were clearly based on a lack of Knowledge. I am not a judge nor do I want to be but we need to have judges that are impartial so we can get a comparative result that will stand up anywhere in the orchid world.

If you have not wanting to be a judge it is worth gaining some understanding from the Judges "Red and Blue" books found on the OCNZ web site.

As this newsletter covers the Odontoglossum alliance I have copied the genera specific info from those two publications.

Judging focuses on the plant and the flowers in so far as they are presented. In summary points are awarded for various aspects of these points so as to provide a level of result. (The points applicable can be found in these publications)

One aspect not clearly identified is the plant name. This is where it's critical that you present the plant for an award with the correct genera and registered name. As we know that is not always easy as we tend to accept the label presented at time of plant purchase as being correct. Unfortunately this is not always the case. I have adopted the practice of reference checking against Orchid Wiz.

If you plant name is not correct the plant will not be judged despite as an example the judging group knowing what the plant is. Also please note the required flower count in each case.

So to help with awareness the following has been copied for the Judges "Red & Blue Books"

Red Book

Oncidium Alliance

Oncidium Alliance Plants showing Onc. alexandrae (syn. Odm. crispum) type form should have lips approximately equal in size to the petals and sepals. Form In general the Onc. alexandrae type flower form should tend toward roundness, fullness and flatness fitting within a circumscribed circle. Flower segments may be serrated or frilled, providing that this does not destroy the overall form. Care must be taken to ensure that the lip is flat and proportionately developed. Not all flowers in this group fit the full round form however and should not be penalized for this e.g. Brassia or Tolumnia etc. Colour The flower colour should have well-defined patterns. Markings should be reasonably well balanced though some variations in spotting are normal. The total effect of various colour combinations should be to give the flower a pleasing bright appearance. The colours of the lip mask and crest should add to the attractiveness of the flower. Size of flower Generally branched spray types will have smaller flowers. In some inter-generics flower size may be smaller than expected, and while this will necessitate a lower score for flower size, it may be easily offset by high evaluations in other areas. Substance and texture The substance should be greater than the average of the parents. Texture should be fresh and crystalline. Any tendency towards transparent spots in pastel flowers must be heavily penalized. Balance, proportion and arrangement of inflorescence The inflorescence may be simple or branched depending on parentage. Lateral branches should be strong enough to carry the flowers without drooping. Bunching and clustering of flowers in some inter-generics is a serious fault. Floriferousness In general spikes should have at least eight flowers and buds.

Blue Book

Oncidium Alliance

Oncidium Alliance This is a large and diverse group showing considerable variation in plant and flower size, shape and colour. As a result of a recent review there have been a lot of name and generic changes. Care will be needed to ensure these are correctly handled – Odontoglossum have been transferred to Oncidium and many Oncidium are now found in Gomesa. Form In general the Onc. alexandrae type flower form should tend toward roundness, fullness and flatness fitting within a circumscribed circle. There have been many generations of breeding in this group so the standard is now well defined. Not all flowers in this alliance fit the full round form however and should not be penalized for this e.g. Brassia or Tolumnia etc. Flower segments may be serrated or frilled, providing that this does not destroy the overall form. Care must be taken to ensure that the lip is flat and proportionately developed. Plants showing Onc. alexandrae (syn Odm, crispum) type form should have lips approximately equal in size to the petals and sepals. Others will show considerable variation according to parentage. Colour The

flower colour should have well-defined patterns. On some plants the flowers will be heavily marked while others will show little or may be self coloured. Markings should be reasonably well balanced though some variations in spotting are normal. The total effect of various colour combinations should be to give the flower a pleasing bright appearance. The ideal is well balanced markings with a mirror image on each side and flowers approaching this should score highly. Muddiness of colour or markings that are poorly defined should be penalized. The colours of the lip mask and crest should add to the attractiveness of the flower. Some species within the alliance are prone to fading of the lip colour as the flowers age. Size of flower Generally branched spray types will have smaller flowers. In some inter-generics flower size may be smaller than expected, and while this will necessitate a lower score for flower size, it may be easily offset by high evaluations in other areas. Considerable variation in flower size can be expected. Flower size will always be governed by parentage so it will be necessary to look closely at this aspect before determining points. Substance and texture The substance should be greater than the average of the parents. Texture should be fresh and crystalline. Any tendency towards transparent spots in pastel flowers must be heavily penalized. Hybrids in the Onc. alexandrae group can have a crystalline texture while others will be velvet or matte. A dull surface can indicate a flower that has aged. Balance, proportion and arrangement of inflorescence The inflorescence may be simple or branched depending on parentage. Lateral branches should be strong enough to carry the flowers without drooping. Where lateral branching is present a well-balanced arrangement is sought. In all cases the blooms should be evenly spaced and well presented. Bunching and clustering of flowers in some inter-generics is a serious fault. This can arise when one parent is many flowered and the other has only one or a few. Hybrids with Miltonia moreliana often exhibit this characteristic. Floriferousness In general spikes should have at least eight flowers and buds. A big variation in flower count will be seen among plants in this group depending on the parentage.

There is an exception within the Oncidium alliance specifically for Miltoniopsis

Blue Book

Miltoniopsis

Miltoniopsis Line breeding and the introduction of polyploidy clones have improved the modern hybrids through increased size, fuller flowers and less reflexing. Floriferousness has improved and presentation tends to be better with flowers held well above the foliage. Form The flowers should be a well-filled-in oval form. The charm of Miltoniopsis comes from their oblong to ovoid shape where the prominent lip balances the smaller overlapping petals and sepals. The sepals should form a slightly flattened triangle that occupies the upper portion of the flower. The sepals and petals should be balanced, wide, but may reflex slightly at their tips. The petals should be flat or slightly reflexed and should fill the gaps between the sepals overlapping them slightly. While some reflexing of the sepals and petals is normal significant reflexing is a fault. The lips should be predominantly large and symmetrical. The lip should be flat and symmetrical. While the edges may be wavy they should not be floppy and there should not be a prominent midrib. The lip can have a waist near the base which is a fault if it compromises the symmetry or fails to overlap the sepals. Colour The colour should be definite, crisp and fresh. Any mask should be sharply defined and symmetrical. Odd colour blotches, as distinct from waterfall lip markings are common in many Miltoniopsis and should not be penalized unless they are a distraction. The colour should always be clear and if multi-coloured they should be clearly defined or pleasantly blended. While Miltoniopsis are known for their striking intense colours there are clones that are equally striking in subtle pastel shades. Don't confuse a pastel flower with a muddy one. If blushing is present it should be uniform and never blotchy. Waterfall patterns or masks on the lip should be in a pleasantly contrasting colour. Substance and texture The velvety texture of good Miltoniopsis should be recognised and rewarded. Texture may sometimes be crystalline but is normally matte. The substance tends to be lighter than in some other orchids and as a consequence the flowers are prone to bruising or heat damage. Balance, proportion and arrangement of inflorescence The inflorescence may be upright or gracefully arching. Flowers should be well spaced and well displayed. The flowers should alternate along the inflorescence and only slightly overlap. A cluttered or poorly spaced inflorescence should be penalized. Floriferousness Miltoniopsis must have at least three flowers and/or buds on the stem. Modern breeding has significantly improved this area so that multiple inflorescences on pseudobulbs can be expected. To score highly well grown plants should be expected to carry two inflorescences of four flowers each. Return to TABLE OF CONTENT

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So what happens when your "Hobby" turns into an "Obsession"

- simple you build another greenhouse.....

Background:

So in the early days of our group the two amigos, namely Allan W and Alan L, got me to write you an article on how I grew Miltoniopsis and Odonts and in those days I had been successfully using Sphag. moss for years and years, however nothing stays still forever, things change and along with the plans to upgrade my greenhouse I decided to get serious about getting the best out of my plants - to do this I needed to have a more regular and intensive fertilizer program rather than the hap hazard method of buying up the bottles of fert from Mitre 10 or the Warehouse when they were on special and using the watering can on a Saturday morning.

So I started using Bioplus Fertilizer with every watering during the growing season and started to have a plan of when and how much I was giving my plants.

Which is when I became horribly unstuck with the Sphag moss ethos. Moss is a great growing medium, don't get me wrong and the plants had thrived in it up to then, but Moss doesn't like fertilizer, certainly not in the concentrations I was now providing to my orchids, as the moss rotted due to the build-up of salts in the pot so did the roots of my orchids - the other down side of this was that, a lot of the carnivo-rous plants I had didn't like it either and they had to be separated out from the orchids or proceed to progressively die over the next 12 months as the moss deteriorated in their pots as well.

With little roots to support the plants I was wasting my time applying the fertilizer, as none of the nutrients were making into the plant. Lots of advice from Brian Pryor as to the process of HOW plants take up nutrients and the process by which they convert these into growth was helpful in making my mine up -Something had to be done, I had to change the way I grew these plants or they were all going to fade away and just become added to the collection of labels in the clay pot on the bench that has RIP written on its side.

Yes I contacted the 2 amigos again to get their opinions - one suggested a fine bark blend and the other suggested fern - no surprises which one that was eh.

So I tried both, and as I had used fern in the past, and I still had some in a bag from that time when I had shredded it up myself. I mixed up a couple of sample brews which contained in one batch – fineish bark, coarse pumice and some finely chopped moss, the other batch had straight fern fibre. I repotted a selection of several Odonts and Milts. Into these new mixes and left them for 6 to 8 months and the results were quite convincing - the new root growth using the fern mix was stunning, so the decision was made and out they all came and were repotted in the fern mix option.

However, I did add some pumice and chopped moss to the fern- my logic behind adding this was to keep the mix opened up as I had noticed that the pure fern that I used, can tend to pack down sometimes and form pockets that became excessively damp and sour for the plants roots - the moss was to maintain moisture – but I have since dropped this (moss) all together from my subsequent potting's with no detrimental effect.

This provided an open mix which I could water and fertilize to my heart's content and the renewed root

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growth was now supporting a healthy robust plant. It is critical though to mention that the plants still need to be flushed out with good clean water from time to time - as always, the best water is rainwater, which I collect of the greenhouse roof.

So, what is this got to do with building a new greenhouse you might ask well, you see at the same time I was playing around with the mix and trying to get that sorted I was also in discussions with the various local authorities about what I needed to do to build a new 6 mtr x 12 mtr greenhouse to house my bulging collection.

After many years of looking at all the different types available on the market in the sizes that I was looking for and of course the Budget \$\$ - I decided on a single layer plastic house along the similar lines as the one Roy and Lee Neale have, many thanks to them for all the info they provided me. Contact was made with Welby Systems and Welby himself and after many chats and a visit to the site he came up with a quote which I duly accepted, and he supplied all the drawings and engineers calcs to get the permit process underway.

Twelve months of toing and froing with Transit NZ, Waikato Regional Council and our Local TCDC, getting neighbor's approval, clearing the site and sorting out drainage plans, I was finally allowed to start work, yes, I was building it myself with Welby's guidance and with the help of my sons, who were there when called upon. We hired just about every machine in the local hire shop, sometimes more than once and started digging foundations - needless to say, that out of the 18 foundation holes we drilled, 4 x fell directly onto rocks and for the next 4 weekends in a row I spent the days on a jack hammer smashing out the required 400mm by 900mm depth to get sign off by the local building inspector.

Anyway 7 months later it was finally finished and ready to start growing orchids in. There were a couple of things I had wanted in the design of this house, Firstly because of the high winds we get being so close to the sea I insisted on a closed roof, despite Welby trying to get me to have a roof Vent running along the top of the roof like the conventional ones – my reasoning was that I have seen what a strong Coromandel easterly wind can do and I just imagined the roof being torn to shreds by one of these events and sent half way across the Firth. Also, as the plastic would be in 2-meter x 3m sections it would be easier for me to replace if necessary, in the future.

Secondly the vents needed to run down both sides of the length of the house, these would be manually operated, with an automated end window, to allow as much air flow as possible and boy, did I need it during that first summer. I could understand what Welby was saying, as the temp sored to well above 50 degrees in the apex of the roof, but the side vents did their job, and I added a layer of shade cloth to the inside of the roof along with painting the outside with a special white paint to keep the temp under control.

Benches where installed, mussel buoys filled with water and placed under the benches to catch the latent heat and then plants put in place – even felt sorry for the cymbidiums for a while and had them on a bench inside, however they were shipped back outside in the summer as it was too hot for them.

The next challenge was **watering** and I hadn't really given enough thought to just how dry all this new space was going to be - for the first 6 months I was hand watering the plants – I think the novelty of having a hose inside the greenhouse and being able to water each time I needed was great for a while how-ever it soon became apparent to me that I was not watering with enough volume and the new mixes we

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talked about earlier where just not getting wet enough along with the increase in humidity needed for a good growing environment.

The obvious signs were those dreaded concertina leaves on the Miltoniopsis started to show up. I had always prided myself on the plants I grew never showing these fans amongst the new growths – back to the drawing board then.

The solution was simple I needed to get more water into the house and increase the humidity so firstly I cut the tops off the mussel buoys to expose the water inside - theory was that as they heated up (some days to 19 degrees) the water would evaporate and provide increased humidity below the benches rising through the plants.

Next - I needed to put in an overhead watering system in. Now there are advantages and some disadvantages of overhead watering, the main downside being any orchid plants that have new growths that form a funnel as they grow – such as Zygopetalums, cattleya's or Coelogyne's, tend to be very susceptible to rotting at the core - so care must be taken to ensure you allow them enough time for these to dry off before a drop in night time temperature.

During the summer when the temps were high, I can water quite late in the day and by leaving the vents open and with a constant sea breeze blowing, seem to be able to get away from this problem - however I need to be very careful when it comes to the cooler months when watering must be restricted to early morning only.

The main advantage - was now I could set the timer on the tap and walk away - providing anything from a 30-minute soak time to up to 45 minutes and the plants responded accordingly - this along with applications of Bioplus fertilizer in each watering has given me some spectacular results so far as the pics will show. One thing Brian Pryor taught me was that if the plant and its root system are healthy then it can take the full advantage of the fertilizer you provide otherwise you are wasting your time and money.

So keep the bugs at bay - the roots strong and healthy - plenty of fresh air circulating – and keep records of temps and notes of the various conditions your plants are meant to grow their best in.

As I was told many years ago by Ron Maunder –" *If it isn't growing then shift it.* "- man of few words our Ron.

This is so true of what I did with the Odonts - I had them growing outside in what "I" thought was the ideal environment however they never read the same books and were in demise. When I looked back at the pictures, I took 5 years earlier and what they were like before I made the move they were certainly going backwards majorly.

The change to the new greenhouse and the change in potting mix has seen them respond well some great growth along with a healthy root system has meant that the majority are well onto the road to recovery - now just got to work on getting some flowers – but they will come - in the meantime I am just happy to see them flourish and get back to a significant size in the pot with each year providing even bigger growths and bulbs and not going backwards and heading for the RIP label pot.









Before photo - this what the bulk of my Odont. and Milt. Collection looked like in Sept 19 – shows the first repotting into a plain Fern Fibre mix which I later changed as described into a blend. They were looking very sad.



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And now the Results:

These are the same plants today - and – No I haven't been loose on Trademe. These are the original plants in the above pic - Miltoniopsis first then Odonts below, I did add the Miltassia's to the Odont bench as well and they have bolted away also.





Conclusion:

You can always teach an old dog new tricks – do not be frightened to change, as long as you do it in a managed and calculated way - don't risk your whole collection on a whim.

The main thing for me was to notice the signs of decline in my plants because "I" had changed something, in this case my fertilizer program, these signs were subtle at first but could have been disastrous if left unchecked. You may not have to go to the extreme of building a new greenhouse, as I did, but just try shifting your plants to another position, another microclimate that you have in your growing space, sometimes just lifting them up slightly higher brings them into a different climate zone. Allow for the seasonal changes and grow accordingly – change the potting mix if think that is the cause - talk to people and they will share their experiences maybe they have had something similar happen.

But remember – one rule may not work for ALL – everyone is different in the way we grow our plants - try a sample first before you make the big call.

Have fun and good growing.

Allan Benson

Further to the article in the last newsletter

Re Growing Zones

After further research I found this info produced by NIWA.

If we relate the info here to orchids some interesting outcomes may occur. For example the text that I have highlighted.

Plant Hardiness Zones

For many years we've found the United States Department of Agriculture's Plant Hardiness Zones useful in assessing a plant's suitability for our climate. Liddle Wonder is now in the process of adopting this system through our labels and public information.

In its simplest terms the USDA system has provided a classification of average minimum temperatures and horticulturalists from around the world have assigned plants to these zones. The classification relates to a plant's ability to handle cold temperatures. Thus, a plant that is able to tolerate a light frost is as-

signed to zone 9, where average minimum temperatures range from -1°C to -5°C.

Plants adopt a range of mechanisms to help them handle cold temperatures. For example many perennials can handle very cold winter conditions by becoming dormant and letting their top growth die off and "retreating" to the warmer soil conditions. They wait for spring warm and shoot away again. Others just lose their leaves, the woody parts of the shrub or tree being better able to withstand cold conditions than the leaves.

We use the phrase "simplest terms" above cautiously - there are many factors that will influence a plant's ability to handle cold conditions - age, shelter, aspect, terrain, soil types, waterlogging among others. Thus, Hardiness Zones provide a guide only, which must be applied with local experience and knowledge

Liddle Wonder contracted NIWA to analyse weather station data to develop New Zealand Zones. We have modified zone boundaries to ensure that there is a difference between the North Island's central plateau and Wanganui for example. In the USA zone 9 goes down to -7°C. If we ap-



plied this in NZ, Turangi would be Zone 9, the same as Wanganui and Tauranga! Many international horticultural reference books contain Zone assignments. We've used these and some "local" knowledge to assign a Zone to plants in our range.

As with all plant and growing circumstances, we cannot over-emphasize the importance of local conditions. Many areas have sites with very specific microclimates, north or south facing aspects, freely drained or cloggy soils. These and many other factors - cold together with wet soil for example - affect a plant's ability to handle harsher or more generous conditions. Above all we encourage gardeners to experiment. This way they'll soon learn the practical boundaries that their garden and site offer, and quickly establish a feel for whether they can garden up a zone, perhaps "half" a zone, and enjoy an even more diverse range of garden plants.

Flasking: What's happening out there?

In short who really knows?

Recent post on face book indicates, there is some commercial activity but little hobbyists' action. This is a shame despite recent workshops presented to encourage flasking we hear little in terms of results.

In part I understand why but as a hobby grower who is prepared to generate seed pods "We need you"

In a recent post on face book I was blown away with the number of

flasks that one commercial grower had recently brought into the country. New growth lines, new varieties will provide some interesting results.

Not a criticism but this does not always support our overall needs. "What you might say"

If we do not try to hybridize crispum type hybrids by either tissue culture or seed pod pollination we may

well run out of this shape of Oncidium. The sad part being that some of the original species are almost not available in New Zealand.

An example on the left is Onc. alexandrae

If you have one please try a selfpollination or have someone tissue culture your plant so we can increase stock. That way we can continue to generate out comes

that may look like this as an example on the right.

In so far as my own activity we have had a successful cross with Miltoniopsis and have another strong seed pod on the way.

> With a revamp of the orchid set up I intend to have a lot more seed pods attempted over the next growing season. This will include more Miltoniopsis and Odontoglossum alliance plants.

In the mean time we will have to continue to rely on the import of flasks by our commercial growers (And I thank them for that).

The latest range from Tucker Nursery should generate an interest from any Odontoglossum alliance grower As I understand some 40 new crosses.





