



**NZ ODONTOGLOSSUM ALLIANCE**

**NEWSLETTER**

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## From the Editor

The show season is upon us already! A number of societies are preparing exhibits for the 50th Anniversary Show in Auckland and such Odontoglossum personalities as Phil Altmann from Australia and Geradus Staal from Southern California will be in attendance. I hear a whisper that Clive Halls from Victoria might be popping over too and a couple of contacts on the Internet from UK, Canada and USA have been asking for details.

For those who haven't come across Geradus Staal from Peninsular Hybrids, Palo Alto, California, a few words might help introduce him. He is speaking to several societies after the conference so you should try and get to hear his talk and slide presentation. Masdevallia growers know the name Mary Staal and several other of his crosses. This genus is one of his favourites and I believe that he is currently president of the Pleurothallid Alliance in the USA. Geradus has also been very active with hybridising the more unusual members of the Odont alliance genera, including Comparettias and Rodriguesias plus rare odont species.

He will be bringing a number of flasks to sell and Ross Tucker will be conducting him around NZ.

Room is short this issue so I will sign off and wish everyone a successful flowering season. I can still do with pictures and articles! Keep them coming please.

**Ron Maunder**

P.O. Box 2107, Tauranga Ph/Fax (07) 552 5570  
email - [pondeeza@enternet.co.nz](mailto:pondeeza@enternet.co.nz)

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## POTTERING ABOUT WITH ODONTS

Lets explode a few myths about Odontoglossums:

1. **"They are difficult to grow"** - fussy yes, difficult no. Give them the conditions they prefer and they grow happily. They like a breezy, reasonably shady area with regular watering in the summer. In the winter more light and less water. Not too hard so far?

2. **"They are difficult to repot"** - not if you time it right. Most new growers of Odonts are told they are tricky to repot - they go into sulks, turn up their toes etc. Rubbish! This bit of misinformation usually goes hand in hand with the next myth you are told. Repot only when the new growths are 2-3 inches high. Rubbish again I say! If you wait until the new growths are the suggested height you may miss the optimum repotting time.

**Repot only when you have new roots showing green root tips!**

After a few years of experience I have found that on most plants the roots are active in Sept-mid Nov. and again in mid March - early May. If I repot at this time I experience no trouble. I have repotted plants in spike at this time also without difficulty. Choose a potting mix that suits the way you water but ensure that it is free draining and will retain a little moisture between waterings.

3. **"Don't use slow release fertilizers on Odonts"** - I do use Osmocote on my Odonts (small quantity) without trouble. Slow release fertilizers generally only cause trouble if you let plants dry out excessively or grow them in very hot conditions. But we don't do that to our Odonts do we? See myth 1.

4. **"Odonts are the most difficult orchids to deflask"** - Wrong again!

Again timing is the key. Best not to deflask in mid winter or mid summer - see timing for repotting. Open your flasks and cover the agar with a little boiled COOLED water and leave in usual place for 3-4 days. This allows the outer layer of the plants leaves to harden slightly and helps to reduce shock. Remove plants from flask and rinse the agar off, but trying not to disturb the root ball any more than necessary. Leave to dry on a paper towel for 3-4 hours then pot the whole clump of plants in a community pot in your preferred mix. I am currently using sphagnum moss (not the pelletised stuff - the long bits). Place your compots in a slightly warm, shady place but don't cover them or try and put them in a humidity tent. The babies like fresh air too! After a couple of weeks they can go out with older plants and be watered & fed like the big ones. I find the more you mollycoddle them the quicker they die! If your conditions for the adults are fine it is suitable for the little ones too.

By now some older and usually wiser established growers are probably holding up their hands in horror at these suggestions but then it works for me!

Odontoglossums are no more difficult than anything else to grow but they suffer from a lot of bad press, however I will acknowledge that there are a number of plants out there that are poor growers. Mainly due to genetic faults I suspect. If most of your plants are thriving you are doing something right, for those few that continue to struggle it is probably better to accept defeat and consign them to the rubbish bin where they belong!

Lets all make a pact to grow our Odonts better in 1999, to buy some new seedlings (when we can get them), and to take them along to our Orchid Society meetings so more people can appreciate what we who have grown Odonts for years already know. They are simply the best!

Cathy Hine Auckland

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## **Headaches for Orchid Importers!**

Some of you who are importing flasks or plants will know of the bureaucratic nightmare going on in the plant world when importing! It seems that the powers that be want to list every known plant and disease found in NZ. A new MAF branch of thirty persons has been set up in Wellington to enforce new legislation. Most government departments don't know who is in charge and you get nowhere trying to find out. First it was a list of every genera that they wanted. Now it is every species of every genera! Evidently a list was prepared a couple of years ago from import permit applications and various other sources but no orchidists were consulted. How stupid of them!

So if you bring in seed, flaked plants or bareroot plants that are not on "The List" then you risk losing them or paying up to \$175 to have each one researched!

### **What is being done about it.**

A number of keen orchid buffs were recently called upon by Kath Bruce of the Orchid Council and spent hours (days in fact!) of their time listing all the orchid genera and species already grown in NZ! Many pages were faxed off to Wellington before a deadline and we hope that they will be entered on "The List", but as we go to press not much headway has been made!

The 45 pages tried to record every known name for an orchid species because if you brought in a *Rhyncostele biconiense* flask and it was only listed as a *Lemboglossum* or *Odontoglossum biconiense* then chances are you would lose it for a day or two till they checked - or it could be destroyed! Unfortunately we will have missed lots of plants as nobody knows all the orchids brought into NZ as plants or seed since our forebears started bringing orchids in by sailing ship in the 1800's. All the hundreds of madmade intergeneric orchids had to be listed and as we know these are being produced daily! A concept the authorities can't understand. Intergeneric hybridizing is rare with other plants.

Lets hope some typist is adding the 45 pages of orchids plus many more of cacti, insectivorous plants, succulents etc to the list! So far they have not. Might I add that lists from other plant experts have similarly been ignored! Imagine having to insert them into a massive alphabetical list! I have no sympathy for them. Such bureaucratic lunacy deserves the contempt it is being given by plantsmen around the country!

### **Access to "The List"**

So, when importing flasks etc make sure the "right" name is on them. You can check the list of acceptable plants by purchasing a copy of "The List" for \$50 or so or on the Internet on a computer at

<http://www.maf.govt.nz/standards/seedstoc/httoc.htm>

### **What's on "The List"**

For your interest, *Odm crispum*, *Odm grande* and *Odm cvs* are the only listed members of *odontoglossum* officially acceptable in NZ. Balderdash! We all know there are many more *Odont* species which have been here for yonks! I strongly suggest you make sure you don't name flasks or seed "Odontoglossum cultivars". That is risky because Border Control do not seem to understand that that should mean all hybrids are acceptable!

"Odontoglossum crispum hybrids" might be a safer bet to name *Odont* hybrid flasks.

If you are looking at bringing in other genera then give yourself plenty of time on the computer as you will have to seek them out amongst the rest of the plant kingdom! There is no orchid section in "The List". By the way don't look for *Masdevallias* as none are approved to be in NZ and there is just *Bifrenaria harrisonii* and *Miltonia flavescens* approved under those genera for example!

### **Problems encountered!**

Some of our members have had expensive hybrid *Odont* alliance flasks destroyed by the

inspectors while bringing them in personally or through the post! Naturally when Border Control tells you it will cost you up to \$175 to have your flask assessed then you let them take it from you! Wellington has always been a problem airport for bringing in flasks and plants from abroad but so now is Auckland!

In Auckland recently a returning grower spent an hour at Auckland International Airport trying to convince the Border Control officers that a flask of Aussie Dendrobium hybrid - Marion Jonelle x Clarrie Wuth, was a kingianum type! Border Control thought these were the growers names and wanted the names of the orchid species. Failing the names, they would destroy the flasks! Cross numbers are also unacceptable. So be prepared for delays and a battle. Don't let them confiscate or destroy your flask without a phone call to higher up. Just ask them to call Michele Dickson at Ph 04 4989631 Wellington to sort it out.

### **No Phyto or Health Certificate**

Another problem often encountered is not having a Health or Phytosanitary Certificate. These are the same certificates. Just two names.

Flasks DON'T need a Phytosanitary or Health Certificate from any country because they are sterile. It helps to have a Health Cert but its NOT necessary for flasks. If its not possible to get to the issuing government department in London or Melbourne before your plane leaves then just bring the flask in and declare it. Those expensive pieces of paper are just a revenue gatherer anyway! NZ Border Control ALWAYS check each flask and NEVER accept the foreign Phyto or Health Certificate as being worth the paper it is written on. The flasks could have been stuffed with cannabis cuttings after you got the permit or have gone mouldy so they have to check. So what's the use of the Phyto? Flasks are inspected on arrival and should only be refused entry if they are contaminated or because they are not on the above mentioned "List". Once again tell them you want them to call Michele, if they want to destroy your flask or send it back at your expense because it has no certificate.

### **So recapping....**

All flasks must have the names of the contents with the flasks. This SHOULD make your passage through Border Control easier. Get a copy of orchids on "The List" to take with you and make sure your flasks are labelled accordingly. Take the above Web Page address with you incase you find a flask of something that tempts you because you can check the list on any computer with an Internet connection from anywhere in the world.

There should be no charge for inspection unless large numbers are imported or you are commercial. GST is charged for values \$NZ 400 and over.

If bringing in flasks of any Paph or Phrag species or species that are on the endangered list you WILL need a CITES certificate from the country where you purchased them.

For bare root plants you will definately need both Health and CITES certificates, a NZ Import Permit (before you go) and a licensed quarantine greenhouse approved on the permit before you leave.

Check all flasks closely for contamination BEFORE you buy them. Good Luck!

If any member has more up to date news on the new legislation please write and tell us.

**Ron Maunder** Tauranga

# ODONTOGLOSSUM ALLIANCE

This paper relates to what I refer to as the "big four", namely *Odontoglossum*, *Odontioda*, *Odontonia* and *Vuylstekeara*. These four genera are probably the closest related of the Odontoglossum Alliance, and seem to like or adapt to the same conditions. Their breeding is as follows:

Odontoglossum (Odm.)	= Natural genus
Odontioda (Oda.)	= Odontoglossum x Cochlioda
Odontonia (Odna.)	= Odontoglossum x Miltonia
Vuylstekeara (Vuyl.)	= Cochlioda x Miltonia x Odontoglossum

**Odontoglossums** can be divided into roughly two main types: the Central American and the Andean Odontoglossum. The first type mentioned, including *Odontoglossum grande*, *Odm. citrosimum* and *Odm. rossii*, do not present much of a problem, since this group will withstand considerable heat and also should be given a definite rest during various periods of the year.

Since we are primarily not concerned with this Central American group, we will discuss the group that is native to the Andean Mountains of South America and does not require a rest period. The latter is a very large group. Sanders list well over 200 species and varieties. Many people, including myself, believe *Odm. crispum* with its many varieties, to be the most beautiful of orchids.

In their natural habitat, we find that collectors describe Odontoglossums as appearing at approximately 6,000 feet or 1,800 metres, and disappearing at approximately 10,000 feet or 3,000 metres in elevation. Growing high in the mountains, near the Equator, they are subject to about every type of water imaginable; heavy fog and morning dew, light frosts and then bright hot days at certain times of the year, and of course, plenty of air circulation, rain and even drought at times. As a rule, they receive plenty of moisture, and collectors of earlier times write that it is easy to tell when you reach Odontoglossum country in that sphagnum moss grows in abundance. The plants in the main are more vigorous, appearing with larger bulbs than generally seen in cultivation, and some attain extremely large sizes with dozens of bulbs.

Originally, I grew my Odontoglossums in a shade house along with soft cane Dendrobiums and several other genera. My first problem was bulb shrivel caused by compost drying out, and heavy pigmentation of the leaves caused by too much sunlight in summer. To overcome this I installed diesel injection nozzles at approximately 1 metre centres and 600mm above the plants, and ran water at town pressure 24 hours a day, and except on very hot days there was always a light film of moisture on the leaves, bulbs and top of the compost. I had also added a top dressing of sphagnum moss to the pot as well as shredded moss to the compost.

This method was successful, but the sphagnum broke down quickly and caused a slime to grow. I had read that in England they grew Odontoglossums in the early days in glasshouses with lots of air circulation and high humidity. I decided to give them a try on the western side of my Paphiopedilum house, adjacent to the opening sides where the air

rushes across the top of the 'slippers'. To my amazement they thrived, and continue to amaze me with their growth and number of spikes, often 3 a bulb and sometimes 4.

They should never be allowed to dry out, as they seem to take as much water as you wish to give them. I experimented once with a plant to see how much it could take before the roots showed any signs of deterioration. The bulb split first and exuded a gum like substance which sealed itself before any damage to the roots occurred. Of course, at all times good drainage with an open compost is required if you are going to water heavily. They must have lots of fresh air, similar to Cymbidiums. They will grow with Cymbidiums, the Cymbidium leaves adding protection and preventing burning of the foliage. You must be prepared to feed them on a regular basis weekly at half recommended strength, and maintain a humidity at daytime as well as night.

As previously mentioned, these plants do not require a rest period, and because their mixed up breeding they require repotting at different times of the year. Consequently, they flower at different times each year, and sometimes twice a year if the bulbs complete their growth cycle.

**Compost:** We use our standard Paphiopedilum mix which is composed of the following ingredients:

3 parts medium bark which has been presoaked to remove some of the toxins.

\_ to 1 part charcoal, approximately the same size as the bark.

1 part polystyrene (milled form as used in bean bags).

To this you need to add if growing in a bush house \_ to 1part shredded sphagnum moss.

If you are potting small seedlings you may need to add an extra amount of fine bark to the mix, and conversely for large plants you may need to add extra polystyrene to maintain full drainage. You have to be prepared to experiment with the compost, adding or subtracting different parts, as in their mixed up breeding some have very fine roots and some have thicker roots which will often clog the drainage hole.

**Pots:** I prefer plastic pots as they are light to handle, do not break, do not support slimes and are cheap to buy and easy store. You should use a pot just larger than the root ball after trimming or potting and pot loosely not jamming the compost down and bruising or breaking the roots, and be prepared to pot sometimes twice a year for optimum results.

**Feeding:** Odontoglossums respond to most of the proprietary brands of fertilisers and poultry manure type slow release. I do not recommend Osmocote type slow release. You must be able to recognise the behaviour of your plants, for example, leaves should stand upright, not crinkled up in the new growth (lack of water) and they should not droop over. You must get the pseudo bulbs of the plant, especially seedlings, to be at least twice the size of the original, or larger on mature plants. Bulbs should have a smooth shiny surface, without wrinkles.

When the new growth shows signs of roots appearing at the base, this is the time to repot or pot on. Often after potting a top dressing of sphagnum moss will encourage the new roots to accelerate and enter the moist moss in a matter of days.

Aquasol is an excellent fertiliser, especially if you jazz it up with 10% of Magnesium Sulphate (epsom salts) and a pinch of Iron Chelate and a few drops of Vegimax. If you are

prepared to use both Blue & Yellow Campbells fertiliser you will find the extra Nitrogen in the Blue is a good boost to a healthy plant, but be prepared to change to the Yellow before the bulb completes its growth cycle, otherwise the bulb fails to flower and goes on to more growth.

**Watering:** It takes a lot of water to keep sphagnum moss growing. In fact, when it is used as a dressing to the plant it gives a good indication of moisture content of the pot. If it is green the moisture content is right, if it turns white more water is needed. If the compost is open you can apply enormous quantities of water without damage to the plant and you will be amazed at their vigorous growth and frequent flowering.

**Temperature:** Odontoglossums, or the four we are referring to, are classed as cool growing. If you can maintain a narrow range between high and low temperature you will find they will suffer less than very hot days and cool nights.

**Shading and Housing:** They will grow in a glasshouse if there is plenty of air induced by louvres or evaporative coolers, and at night by air circulated by fans. In a bush house they will grow amongst Cymbidiums or other foliage plants, but must receive extra water to prevent drying out by way of misting and dampening the floor.

Be prepared to adjust the shading at least twice a year or more if necessary to prevent bronzing of the leaves.

**Diseases and Pests:** Small garlic snails and slugs will feast on the new root tips, and grasshoppers love new leads, also, mice will enjoy the new flower buds, so you have to prevent these types of attack. Regular application of fungicides, i.e. Alliette® and Mancozeb® as preventative is recommended. You will find with good culture they will outgrow most of their troubles.

**Flowering:** When the flower spikes appear, turn the plant to the lightest part of the glass or shade house. This will give good shaped spikes and even spacing of flowers. You must also apply at this stage copious amounts of water to the plant to prevent the inflorescence from breaking. They are capable of producing up to four spikes per bulb and up to 20-25 flowers per spike. If you can also produce branching of the highly bred Odontiodas you are knocking on the door of good culture.

Members of the Odontoglossum alliance are very popular and attractive plants to grow, and often flower when other plants do not. I have found that the plants that flower in the cooler months leading up to spring seem to carry the most flowers with more substance than those of the summer/autumn flowering.

**Wal. Rhodes, Camira Orchids, Sydney, Australia**

(With kind permission from Wal Rhodes and the North Shore Orchid Society, Sydney for the use of this article from their newsletter)

## Another O E or Orchid Experience!

After reading Nick Symes' account of his recent trip to Britain on not being able to get to Jersey and the Eric Young Foundation we found ourselves smugly thinking we had everything under control for our forthcoming trip which was in May & June. We had our air fares, accommodation and rental car all booked and paid for and though we hadn't been able to confirm the opening days we had been assured that Allan Moon was very obliging and always willing to allow orchid growers to visit at other times. Usually when glass houses were being watered etc. After an early morning flight from Guernsey, which incidentally is a lovely place for a holiday, we decided to go to Church before doing our sightseeing. Our Motel had an out of date Mass timetable so we arrived at the church half an hour early and started chatting to a lady who was interested in our plans while on the island. She was a personal friend of Mrs. Moon and offered to contact them for us as Sunday was not one of the days open to the public.

We understood Nick Symes' disappointment when we were told Allan Moon was away and we didn't have any other contact. We drove out on the off chance someone might be there but to no avail and as the open days were Thursday to Saturday it seems we will just have to try and visit again sometime.

Ron Maunder had asked us to try and look up Ray Bilton formerly of McBeans and now at Orchid Answers in Chichester. This time we were a bit luckier as the nursery was open but Ray was also away. We spent some time there with Veronica who's T shirt assured us she was the head gardener. The nursery had been open 18 months and had previously been a salad garden growing peppers and celery so there was a large area of glasshouse space already there. They had just returned from the BBC Gardeners World Flower Show in Birmingham where they were awarded a Gold Medal and judged the best exhibit in the Floral Marquee. The display had been made out of tree poles covered in moss with the plants attached to the poles. They had a beautiful collection of Phalaenopsis and Miltonias and also grow Cymbidiums and Cattleyas and are building up an Odontoglossum range. In January 98 Ray had been awarded the Gold Veitch Memorial medal for services to horticulture in Orchids and in the August edition of the RHS magazine "The Garden" I see a photograph of his stand at the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show where he was judged the best floral marquee exhibitor new to the show. I have sent some copies of information about this nursery to Ron so contact him if you are interested in visiting them. It was easy to find and very worthwhile.

We saw lots of orchids on our travels starting in the Conservatory at Queen Elizabeth Park in Vancouver to the Chelsea Flower Show where McBeans had a large display as did the British Orchid Societies. The ones which stood out for me though were the Vandas from Garland Orchids of Asia and R F Orchids. The colours were really different and oh so tempting. We saw some lovely potted Phalaenopsis for sale in a florist at Engelberg in the Swiss Alps and wondered how they would survive the winters and then the lovely display at the airport in Singapore when we were homeward bound.

We made a very brief visit to McBeans to purchase a flask of what were going to be future show winning Odontodas only to have them confiscated and destroyed at the Wellington Airport along with some seeds including Sweetpeas which I knew didn't have any

quarantine restrictions. I am still trying to find out why there is a different criteria between Auckland and Wellington airports but it is difficult when letters remain unanswered. We can only advise anyone travelling back through Wellington to insist their confiscated goods are not destroyed until the Auckland facility has been contacted during working hours.

Apart from a few minor problems we enjoyed a wonderful 6 weeks of sightseeing, garden visiting and shopping in many parts of the world and really hope we will be able to have the opportunity to travel again.

**Biddy and Cliff Hair** Bay View, Napier

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## Illustrations

### 1 **Orchid Answers Ltd - nr Chichester, UK**

Various *Odontoglossum* alliance plants. After leaving McBeans, Ray Bilton started Orchid Answers in West Sussex. The brochure says that the nursery contains over 25,000 sq ft devoted to orchids with a 1600 sq ft display house.

### 2 **Orchid Answers - Paph and Phally House**

Most of the UK orchid nurseries are today buying in stocks of mass produced mericlone plants in bud from Holland and Germany. Note the clear plastic pots for *phalaenopsis* plants which are very popular in the Northern Hemisphere at present. They allow the roots to photosynthesize.

### 3 ***Oncidium forbesii* 'Sunnybank' AM/OCNZ**

Purchased as a small seedling from L&R Orchids by Claire and Graham Hirst of Sunnybank Crescent, Hastings, the plant when awarded had 52 x 4cm flowers to a branched spike. Judges granted it an AM with 80 points.

### 4 ***Odm. uro-skinneri* x *Odm. Vexitivum***

A speculative cross which no one will admit to! Made at the Taranaki Summer Display several years ago. This attractive clone was grown by Beryl and Bob Goodger of Tauranga from plants raised and donated to members by Alf Day. The cross was made both ways. *Odm Vexitivum* is *Odm cordatum* x *nebulosum*.

### 5 ***Oda. Point Lonsdale* 'Rita'**

As promised last month, this and the adjoining flower are the parents of the cross which Paul Cable wrote about in his article entitled "Two Flasks". A number of his flowers from these parents were shown in colour in the March issue. Members have many others.

### 6 ***Oda. Echanson***

Although not the well known clone 'Operetta', this seedling of Gerald McCraith's from Melbourne carries similar characteristics of color, vigour and white tips. The colour however does not seem to be dominant in Gerald's as yet unnamed hybrid.

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**Photo Credits** 1 & 2 Colin and Biddy Hair, Napier 3 Graham Hirst, Hastings  
4 Bob Goodger, Tauranga 5 & 6 Gerald McCraith, Australia



1 Orchid Answers Ltd - nr Chichester, UK

2 Orchid Answers - Paph and Phally House



3 *Oncidium forbesii* 'Sunnybank' AM/OCNZ

4 *Odm. uro-skinneri* x *Odm. Vexitivum*



5 *Oda. Point Lonsdale* 'Rita'

6 *Oda. Echanson*