

The Certificate of Botanical Merit

Anonymous

Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1973, page 15

In all countries in which members of the American Orchid Society live, there is a constantly increasing interest in the cultivation of orchid species. Sometimes this enthusiasm derives from a desire to enlarge collections by adding plants which have unusual interest because of their rarity in their natural habitats. In these cases, successful greenhouse culture and propagation of such plants may provide an important safeguard against irreparable loss of endangered species. In other cases, new species are sought and grown not primarily because they are known to be especially scarce in nature but because they have a notable rarity in cultivation, either because of difficulty of culture, or, more often, because formerly these plants, if grown at all, were not regarded as having much horticultural merit and so were not preserved in collections. The multifaceted programs of intergeneric breeding and of the making and remaking of primary hybrids, such as are now being carried on intensively by many growers, benefit from and, indeed, upon the availability of clones of orchid species which have unusual characteristics of quality. Recognition of such characteristics by a Judge requires detailed familiarity with the most reliable published descriptions of the plant which are available, and, whenever possible, upon personal observation of a significant number of other clones of that species.

The Certificate of Botanical Merit is available as an award to recognize well-grown plants of uncommon species which, by virtue of possessing one or more outstanding characteristics or one or more characteristics in outstanding degree, represent a worthy new concept of horticultural desirability. This Certificate may be granted more than once to the same species if different clones have significantly different characteristics.

Thoughtful consideration of the foregoing paragraph, which presently governs the awarding of the CBM, leads to the self-evident conclusion that it is imperative the Judges who are considering a plant for this award take great care to insure that the plant is correctly identified. As a rule, it cannot be assumed that either the exhibitor or any single Judge is an infallible authority on taxonomy. However, it is possible for knowledgeable judges to compare the plant and its flowers with more than one of the published descriptions which may be available in reference books on hand at the time of Regional and Subregional Judgings as well as at Show judgings. Thus, it is very often possible for experienced Judges, even though they are not taxonomists, to recognize an incorrectly labeled species. Experience and observation have shown that this is not always done, and the value of the CBM award - and, in fact, of all AOS awards - is destroyed whenever an incorrectly identified plant is awarded. The responsibility for keeping such errors at an absolute minimum rests, at present, exclusively with the judging team, and all Judges are

urged to accept this responsibility seriously. In keeping with this thought, it is recommended that the written record of every CBM award include, whenever possible, reference to an authoritative source from which an effort was made by the Judging team to verify identification of the plant.

Another significant Judging responsibility which possibly is more important in the case of CBM awards than in that of any other kind of award, is the recording of an adequate description and of a sufficient number of measurements of the awarded plant. Only if such detailed records are available in the Awards Quarterly can a comparison of clones be made and an intelligent decision reached by another Judging team at another time about whether a plant of the same species which it is considering for a CBM award has, in fact, "Significantly different characteristics" from previously awarded clones.

One further point which is worth discussing is that it is not the intention of the CBM award that it be given without fail at least once to every orchid species which is collected and cultivated. Thus, in considering an exhibit of a relatively newly imported plant, which may or may not be poorly established but whose flowers are representative of the species, it should not be assumed that the plant should receive a Certificate of Botanical Merit if the flowers are not distinctly outstanding horticulturally. Conscientious use of Point Scale Number 11 ("Botanical Merit") by every Judge who is involved in evaluating orchid species for possible recognition by the award of a CBM is urged.