

AOS Awards to *Renanthera*

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Renanthera is a genus of orchids with branched inflorescences that create a fiery display. They have been described as “the showiest of the monopodials” (Kennedy, 1979). Despite their attractiveness, only eight of the 15 to 17 species described as *Renanthera* have been recognized by the American Orchid Society, with a total of 21 awards. This represents a much smaller number of awards than could be expected, based on the natural beauty of these species and the number of AOS awards known to have been given to similarly stunning species. This paucity of awards is probably due to the faithful application by AOS judges of the criteria for vandaceous orchids as proposed in the *Handbook on Judging and Exhibits, 10th Edition*.

“The general form of the flower is toward roundness, fullness and flatness. The sepals should be broad and rounded, and should be arranged in an equilateral triangle. The dorsal sepal should be as nearly equal to the lateral sepals as possible. The petals should be broad and rounded, as nearly equal to the dorsal sepal as possible, and should fill the gap between the sepals.”

Obviously, the natural form of a *Renanthera* species – open flowers, more narrow than tall, dorsal sepal much smaller than the lateral sepals – does not conform to the above criteria. Also, by emphasizing individual flowers, most point scales give little weight to the combined display of many colorful flowers on an inflorescence, which is the essence of *Renanthera*. Instead of the *Vanda* scale, *Renanthera* should be judged on the General Point scale, which allows 10 points for the consideration of the inflorescence. Even then, the desired form of the flower is still toward “roundness, fullness, and flatness.” Of the AOS awards to *Renanthera* species, at least one, and possibly others, appear to have been given erroneously, and should be so considered when conducting research for a potential award.

The Register of Awards for September 22, 1937, lists two entries that represent the first AOS awards to *Renanthera*: *Renanthera storiei* – exhibited by Hubert K. Dalton, Rumson, New Jersey, and *Renanthera coccinea* – exhibited by Mrs. W.K. DuPont, Wilmington, Delaware. *Renanthera coccinea*, the type species for the genus *Renanthera*, received a second Culture Certificate (CC) in Miami, Florida, in 1948. Then, in 1995 at the Miami International Orchid Show, a Certificate of Cultural Merit (CCM) or 86 points was given to a cultivar of *Ren. Coccinea*, an 11-foot-tall plant with “10 spikes each with about 75 flowers,” (RA Suppl.V:811). As recently as April 6, 1996, a CCM of 87 points was given in Washington, DC, to the United States Botanical Gardens for the cultivar bearing their name; therefore, all AOS awards to *Ren. coccinea* have been cultural awards.

However, in my opinion, the latest award to *Ren. coccinea* is questionable. The flowers of *Ren. coccinea* ‘US Botanical Garden’, CCM/AOS, were described as larger than typical. They appeared to have unusual coloration, and there were more flowers per inflorescence than would be expected for *Ren. coccinea*.

Examination of the AOS slide of the plant and inflorescence reveals that the plant habit, inflorescence habit and the shape of the flower all tend to indicate similarity with the hybrid, *Renanthera* Brookie Chandler (*monachica* x *storiei*). Furthermore, the grower

provided information that the plant blooms more than once a year, which is not typical of *Ren. coccinea*, but is typical of the above-mentioned hybrid.

Therefore, it would appear that species verification is indicated, and these concerns should be considered when research is conducted for *Ren. coccinea* awards. As can be ascertained from the 1965 and 1996 descriptions of the awards, cultural recognition was certainly in order, especially considering that *Ren. coccinea* requires full, bright sunlight, and can be a recalcitrant bloomer. Because both the species and its hybrids can be difficult to flower, *Ren. coccinea* has been largely supplanted in horticulture and hybridization by other species of *Renanthera*.

Renanthera storiei, also one of the two first species awarded by the AOS, is the species historically most often grown and used in hybridization. Endemic to the Philippines, *Ren. storiei* is prized for its large flowers, usually intense red with velvety darker red blotches. This intense red coloration is usually dominant in hybrids with this species. Other than the above-mentioned CC, the remaining three AOS awards to *Ren. storiei* are all quality awards, a situation that is unusual for AOS awards to *Renanthera* species. In June, 1973, *Ren. storiei* 'Maybrook' was given an HCC of 76 points in Seattle, Washington, for 114 flowers and 82 buds on a single branched inflorescence. Natural spread of the flowers was 4.5 cm. Nine years later, in August, 1982, AOS judges in Long Beach, California, gave a 75-point HCC to the unusually colored cultivar 'Liong Lie Gan', which bore on one inflorescence 54 yellow-orange flowers with rose-red pinpoints on the dorsal sepal and petals, similarly colored small blotches on the lateral sepals, and measured 5.1 cm in natural spread. The lip was also unusually colored, the typical red base, but with white, not yellow, striations.

The third AOS award was to *Ren. storiei* 'Crimson Tide', an Award of Merit (AM) of 80 points awarded in Miami, Florida, in June, 1990. This clone bore 89 flowers and 112 buds on one inflorescence. The flowers measured 4.5 cm in natural spread by 6.9 cm vertically, and were typically colored red-orange with crimson spots and velvety blotches. Excellent descriptions were provided for each of these three awards.

Renanthera monachica, also endemic to the Philippines, has received five AOS awards. However, the cultivar 'Riviera', given a 78-point Highly Commended Certificate (HCC) in Long Beach in June, 1968, was described as having 102 flowers (approximately 4.4 cm) yellow-orange with maroon bands. This is more flowers and larger flowers than would be expected for the species; also, *Ren. monachica* is yellow with red spots, not bands, making the award even more suspect.

There was no AOS photograph for his award, but the owner, E.J. Voelker, wrote an article published in the AOS *Bulletin* in 1970, on the "Culture of *Renanthera monachica*," in which he included two photographs of the cultivar *Ren. monachica* 'Riviera', HCC/AOS, when it was awarded. These photographs indicate that the plant habit, the inflorescence habit, and the flower shape all tend to suggest hybridization with *Ren. storiei*, which would make 'Riviera' a cultivar of *Ren. storiei*. Brookie Chandler.

The one previous AOS award to *Ren. monachica* was a CCM of 88 points to the cultivar, 'Rayna L. Wallbrunn', given in May, 1966, in Gainesville, Florida. This cultivar also bore many more flowers per inflorescence than would be expected for the species. Unfortunately, the only comment in the description as to color was "color bright with well-placed spots." There was no AOS award photograph, so the identity of this cultivar can only be taken at face value.

Three additional CCMs were given to growers of this species: for the cultivar, 'Paul', receiving 82 points in San José, Costa Rica, in March, 1980; for the cultivar, 'Suzanne', given 81 points in New York in 1992; and for the cultivar 'D&B 35', awarded 82 points in Florida in 1997. *Renanthera monarchica* 'Paul', CCM/AOS, carried 300 flowers on 12 inflorescences on a 78-cm plant with two keikis. The clone 'Suzanne' bore 250 flowers and 100 buds on nine branched inflorescences on a 120-cm plant with multiple keikis. And 'D & B 35' carried 350 flowers and 65 buds on 10 branched inflorescences on a plant 169 cm tall with multiple keikis. Flowers measured 2.9, 3.0, and 3.5 cm (NS), respectively.

These three awards are in line with what would normally be expected of a well-grown *Ren. monarchica* – multiple inflorescences, approximately 30 to 40 flowers per inflorescence, and multiple keikis. This species can also bloom two to three times per year, an aspect that cannot be evaluated under the current AOS point system. *Renanthera monarchica* can begin to bloom when the plant is about seven years old and measures only 5 to 6 inches high. However, a hardy mature plant of the species may grow to four feet in 15 to 20 years of good culture.

Renanthera imschootiana has received three awards from the American Orchid Society: an HCC, a CCM and an AM. The first, a 79-point HCC, was given to the cultivar 'Malibu' in Los Angeles in May 1974. The award description mentioned 506 flowers and many buds on two inflorescences. This is many more flowers than would be expected of any *Renanthera* species, and may represent a misreading or a typographic error.

Further, the description indicates the flowers were solid scarlet with small gold markings in the lip. This is the color pattern of *Renanthera philippinensis*, not *Ren. imschootiana*, which has solid red to red-orange lateral sepals, but yellow petals dotted red, with spots more dense distally, a distinguishing characteristic. *Renanthera philippinensis* may bear 100 or more flowers per inflorescence, so if the number of flowers actually was 206 on two inflorescences, it is likely that this cultivar awarded as *Ren. imschootiana* was actually *Ren. philippinensis*.

The second AOS award involving *Ren. imschootiana* was an 81-point CCM to the grower of the cultivar 'Motes Red Rampant', given in April, 1988 in Miami. The plant measured 82 cm tall and bore a 34 cm keiki. There were 143 flowers and 139 buds on six inflorescences, two of which were on the keiki. Flowers measured 3.5 cm natural spread, and 5.8 cm in vertical dimension. The leaves were said to be "slightly yellowish, grayish ... and a bit dehydrated ... doubtless due to the windy weather and the huge number of flowers." Actually, although the combined effect of six inflorescences in bloom was probably spectacular, 47 flowers per inflorescence would be considered average for the species.

The third AOS award to *Ren. imschootiana*, given in April, 1995 in Philadelphia, was an 86-point AM to the cultivar, 'Nancy', a product of the outcross of the clones 'Newberry' and 'Saigon' by Carter and Holmes. The clone 'Nancy' produced 55 exceptionally large flowers and 39 buds on one 75 cm branched inflorescence. Natural spread was 6.2 cm, measured at the tips of the widely spreading lateral sepals; the vertical dimension was 7.7 cm, due to the exceptionally long dorsal and lateral sepals. The AOS description and photograph leave no doubt as to the identity and excellence of the cultivar. It can be noted that *Ren. imschootiana*, from cooler mountainous areas in the Indian Himalayas,

through Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, can tolerate somewhat cooler temperatures than the other species in this genus.

The growth habit of plants found in Vietnam is much more vining than plants available from India, and the flowers are generally red instead of red-orange, giving rise to conjectures that this may actually be a subspecies. Judges should also be aware that some plants now being sold as a mericlone of *Ren. imschootiana* from Southeast Asia actually have plant and flower characteristics that indicate hybridization with *Ren. storiei*. These plants, more correctly identified as *Renanthera Kilauea*, will bloom several times a year, and outside the usual April through June blooming season for *Ren. imschootiana*. The flowers bear the read “teardrop” of coalesced spots at the tips of the petals, inherited from *Ren. imschootiana*, but the side lobes of the lip are squared and truncated and bear yellow radiating lines (all traits of *Ren. storiei*), instead of being solid-colored, pointed and triangular (as found in *Ren. imschootiana* flowers). Also, the leaves are much larger and more leathery than those found in *Ren. imschootiana*.

Ren. philippinensis, endemic to the more tropical areas of the Philippines, was first recognized by the AOS with an 83-point Certificate of Botanical Merit to the cultivar ‘Wallbrunn’, awarded in Tampa, Florida, in November 1966. This cultivar carried 99 flowers and 25 buds on one branched inflorescence, on a small plant. The flower color was described as yellow with an overlay of carmine red. There were yellow markings in the sepals and petals. The side lobes of the lip were bordered with burgundy red, but tapered to cream.

This most unusual coloration for a species typically considered to have solid red sepals and petals, and a red lip punctuated with two white calli, centered by an orange spot. (The calli are known to yellow with age.) Although the AOS photograph is black and white, it illustrates part of an inflorescence, with flowers having large flat lateral sepals, widely held, and appearing to have the basic shape expected of this species.

The second AOS award to *Ren. philippinensis* was given 30 years later, in June, 1996, in Miami, to the cultivar ‘Red Hot’. This award was a well-deserved 84-point AM, as the 14-inch tall plant carried 117 flowers and five buds on a single branched inflorescence. The flowers were described as sepals and petals cherry red, lip basally yellow, tipped deep cherry red.

More recently, *Renanthera matutina* has been the recipient of one award from the AOS, a Certificate of Botanical Recognition (CBR) for the unusually colored cultivar ‘Curazon Guzman Banez’, given in February 1994 in Oklahoma City. There were 52 flowers and 18 buds on two inflorescences; the flowers were yellow with a faint fuchsia suffusion and prominent fuchsia maculations on all segments.

Flower shape was slightly better than typically expected for the species, with fewer sepals and petals, the lateral sepals appearing like an inflated pantaloon, but not strongly reflexed or crossed at the tips as is characteristic of the species. Since this flower exhibited unusual color form, perhaps either a Judges Commendation or a Certificate of Horticultural Merit would have been more appropriate.

Renanthera elongate has also received one award from the AOS, an 80-point Certificate of Botanical Merit to the cultivar ‘Ruth’, given in Jacksonville, Florida, in November 1971. The flowers of this plant were the rare clear yellow form of this typically rose-red species. There were 114 flowers and over 200 buds on an inflorescence with nine branches. Natural spread of the typically small flower was reported as 7/16 inch.

The most recent award to a *Renanthera* species was an 82 point CHM to the ‘Andres’ clone of the previously unrecognized species, *Renanthera bella*. This rare species, endemic to Borneo, has until recently seldom been seen outside its native habitat, in part due to its difficulty of cultivation. *Renanthera bella* is a small plant, with 13 to 16 relatively large flowers blotched red-purple and having an elongated star shape. Two primary hybrids have been registered with this species, one with *Ren. storiei*, the other with *Ren. monachica*. The cross with *Ren. monachica*, *Renanthera* Wynn McPheeters, is known to produce robust but small-growing plants with attractive, long-lasting flowers. The hybrid flowers may resemble either parent in number, shape, and color. In summary, it can be seen that *Renanthera* species are infrequently recognized by the American Orchid Society, and that some of the awards given reflect a lack of familiarity of some judges with this genus. Treatments of the genus have to date covered only part of the species, with few being covered definitively or in depth. This lack of available information suggests the importance of reliable botanical identification prior to the finalization of any awards.

References:

General reference material include the American Orchid Society, Inc. *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, 10th Edition; Awards Quarterly and Register of Awards*; Fisher and Bishop’s list; *AOS Awards 1932-1995*. Information was also gleaned through personal communications with C. Ayteo, Director of Orchid Horticulture at the United States Botanical Gardens, E.A. Christenson, G. Crocker, M. Motes and B. Thoms.

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