

Judging in Foreign Countries

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Although every show holds its mysteries until judging begins, and we never know what remarkable flower may be discovered under the nearest fern, after judging in one's own region for several years, many of the orchids that will be shown are quite familiar to us. To experience the excitement of being a student again, join the expanding world of international judging.

Traditionally, the international community gathered only every three years at the World Orchid Conferences, but recent years have brought a rash of "international" shows around the globe. In the past, a few foreign visitors have been customary at the large New York, Santa Barbara and Miami shows, and their numbers are swelling. In turn, more AOS judges are spending holiday time visiting another country for the opportunity of judging a show. Concurrently, we're all feeling the effects of the new emphasis upon the mass-production of pot plants worldwide. Truly, orchid exhibition and judging have gone global, and it is important that judges expand their vistas.

Some overseas shows have sanctioned AOS judging, some do not. Of those who do not request AOS judging, some follow our procedures closely, and some adopt a style more akin to Royal Horticultural Society appreciation judging. All are worthwhile adventures for the judge who wishes to expand his or her horizons and make new orchid friends. Fulfilling our requirements by judging in our own regions is no longer sufficient for the judge who is conscientiously trying to keep up with the newly discovered species and recent hybrids created by knowledgeable orchidists worldwide.

About three years ago, a unique occasion for sharing expertise was arranged by AOS President Don Herman and the calanthe growers of Japan. AOS judges have regularly visited the Tokyo Grand Prix and other Japanese shows since the World Orchid Conference in Tokyo in 1987, where calanthes regularly compete. However, this genus is not seen in quantity or variety in our country, and our judges have felt incompetent to judge them. Now, every spring a group of five AOS judges (two new ones each year) is invited to participate in the study and judging of the annual *Calanthe* show that is held in a different city each year. In addition to the exchange of orchid information, valuable new friendships have been forged.

We have long enjoyed the shows just off our Caribbean shores – on the islands, in Central America and the countries of northern South America. These almost invariably involve AOS judging under the auspices of the Florida-Caribbean Judging Region. One may be invited to judge or may simply sign-in at judging time. However, if you know your plans far enough in advance, it is courteous to notify the judging chairman that you plan to attend. This will help the chairman in appointing teams and, in the event hospitalities are planned, will assist the show hosts as well.

Frequently, local judges will be given the responsibility of judging their indigenous species, because they are usually better informed about these particular plants than their visitors. Of course, these orchids may be considered by the AOS judges also. If shows are held regularly by a given society, check back issues of the Awards Quarterly for past awards to familiarize yourself with some of the plants you are likely to see. Consult with

fellow judges who have visited your target area previously to learn about both the plants and the local experts.

In one instance in Colombia, my hosts graciously asked me to chair the team assigned to the *Cattleya* species. A member of the team was the acknowledged expert on these beauties, much more informed about the various color forms and varieties than I. It was a privilege to bow to her expertise and learn from her, rather than muddling through myself. By yielding to superior understanding of a class, the visitor immediately gains respect and appreciation. The local expert delights in teaching a guest, who greatly benefits from receiving instruction with live material at hand.

Not only do we see unfamiliar plants in the shows, but there are frequently opportunities to view native species in the wild. The VIII International Orchid Show of Ecuador (Quito, February 1994) is a case in point. More than 20 AOS judges participated in the judging of the show; then, many of them had the privilege of going into the jungle with Alexander Hirtz and other guides to see the orchids in their native habitats.

There is a hunger for information about the AOS judging system, and the visitor should be prepared to explain as much as time and circumstances permit. Often a visitor is asked to chair a team during ribbon judging. This provides an excellent opportunity for teaching about our judging system, as well as about the individual flowers. Quietly ask at the beginning of ribbon judging whether or not the team would welcome an explanation of your decisions, and you will find that your team is eager to accept your invitation.

Moving farther off shore, we encounter more differences, not only in judging procedures but in the background and training of the judges themselves. Few judging systems require the intensive training the AOS imposes upon its students. One exception is South Africa, where training and procedures closely parallel ours. More often, judges are chosen for their long experience in the field, just as our judges were years ago. If you have a chance to judge far away from the Americas, make an effort to learn about local customs and protocol. This may save you from an innocent mistake that could be embarrassing to you and to your hosts.

Sometimes a visitor can be of assistance to the local judging chairman faced with an awkward problem. My team was once prepared to give a blue ribbon to what was obviously the best entry in the class, when I pointed out that the plant was infected with scale. I mentioned that AOS schedules disallow the exhibiting of diseased or pest-infected material and asked if their schedule had a ruling in this regard. No one on the team seemed to know. The judging chairman was consulted but appeared reluctant to take a stand. It turned out that the plant was owned by the foremost local grower, well-liked and respected by everyone, and no one wished to rule against his entry. However, the chairman eagerly seized upon the AOS rules, thereby taking the action he deemed correct without offending his friend. One must be very careful and diplomatic in such instances, though, to avoid being a “know-it-all” or leaving the impression that AOS rules are all-important.

If you are visiting England, it may be possible for you to arrange to view RHS judging. In this instance, you will be an observer, not a participating judge, but the experience is fascinating and worthwhile. In my experience, the judging moved quite rapidly with a minimum of discussion, and the quality of the plants submitted was exceptional.

In spite of our various differences, it is amazing how well everyone works together, as demonstrated at the World Orchid Conferences. If you long for the new and different, try

judging in another country. A broad knowledge of orchids, plus a sensitivity to the feelings and customs of others, is all the basic equipment needed for a valuable and rewarding foray into “foreign” judging.

Never forget you are representing the AOS and its judging system, which is respected worldwide. Your appearance, demeanor and conduct must be beyond reproach. In most cases you will feel very comfortable, as many other countries have patterned their judging after the AOS system. If AOS judging is not being conducted, simply follow the lead of your host. However, if AOS judging has been approved for the show, the following guidelines should prove helpful.

- As an honored guest, you probably will be asked to captain a team, or even chair the judging, in which case, the judging kit may be sent to you. Carry it in your hand luggage, not in a suitcase that may be misdirected by the airline.
- Assemble all judges or your team as appropriate, and carefully explain how judging will be conducted. Local members will expect to participate in the ribbon judging. Learn the names of those persons working with you. If the names are unfamiliar to you, take time to write them down. If you are unsure about anything, ask your hosts. Good sense and good manners are the order. Don't try to muddle through.
- As chairman of judging, make sure that adequate arrangements have been made for awards photography and that the photographer receives the instructions in the judging kit. If possible, photography should immediately follow judging. In tropical countries, shows often are held outdoors where wind or rain can imperil blooms if photography is delayed until the following day. Failure to obtain good pictures of awarded plants is the most frequent complaint on foreign shows.
- Although AOS judging may have been requested, local judges often judge their native species also. Make sure that any fine species plants, which may be in the hands of the local judges during AOS scoring, are not overlooked by the AOS teams.
- Make certain that *ALL* details required by the summary sheet are completed *BEFORE* leaving the show scene. Request assistance from your hosts in determining correct names and addresses of the exhibitors and varietal names given to their awarded plants. Verify the addition on each score sheet as well as the average scores. It may prove difficult, even impossible, to obtain this information after judging is complete.
- Before leaving the U.S., obtain advice from the AOS Awards Registrar regarding which taxonomists in the foreign country are accepted for species identification by the AOS. For example, in Latin America, Dr. Carlyle Luer, Dr. Robert Dressler, Dr. Margaret Dix, or Rodrigo Escobar may be present to assist. In any case, exhibitors should receive the instructions regarding species identification and procedures to be followed in the case of an unregistered hybrid. All of these instructions are included in the judging kit.
- In advance, try to learn everything possible about the plants and people you will be meeting. Ask friends who have been there and consult your library to identify local “experts.” Often these shows are annual events, so previous awards can be checked in the *Awards Quarterly*.

- Without doubt, you will be entertained graciously. The most welcome gifts, and the easiest to obtain and carry, are also the least expensive. Copies of the latest *AOS Bulletin* and *Awards Quarterly*, the Fisher-Bishop lists of awards and hybrids, or any other new AOS publication are sure to make a hit with either male or female hosts. (During judging, the Fisher list also will help you avoid duplicating CBR and CHM awards.)

Whenever possible, seize the opportunity to broaden your judging knowledge and make new friends by judging in other countries. Be a polite guest, one who has come to learn, to share and to teach when appropriate – not a visiting “know-it-all.”

Donna Craig has many accomplishments to her credit, almost too numerous to list. She is an accredited judge from Houston; she was a co-owner of a commercial orchid nursery....