

Evolution of the Philosophy of Orchid Judging

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Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1985, page 149

In the beginning there was the Royal Horticultural Society. This august body was responsible not only for evaluating orchids but also for judging all cultivated plants and flowers in England as well as those sent from parts of Europe.

It was quite natural that the task of judging orchids on a regular basis would to the most knowledgeable growers of orchids, both amateur and commercial.

It was also natural that the American Orchid Society in its early days of orchid evaluation would use RHS methods to a large degree.

The first published American Orchid Society award as listed in the *A.O.S. Register of Awards* follows. Note the absence of description and number of points:

*Board of Trustees Meeting
Philadelphia, Pa.
April 29, 1932*

*A.M. Cattleya Schroederiae var. Hercules
--- Exhibited by F.E. Dixon, Elkins Park, Pa.*

The first published award giving the plant description, found on pages 40-41 of the *Register of Awards*, is shown below:

*Board of Trustees Meeting
Rodney Wilcox Jones
New Rochelle, N.Y.
December 8, 1943*

F.C.C. Phalaenopsis Doris (Elisabethae x Katherine Siegwart)

The plant was in a 6 3/4" basket and carried six leaves. The stem was 50" long. The length of the spike from flowers to ends of the pods was 27". There were eight buds not open and twelve fully developed. The flowers measured 4 5/8" spread, petal width 3 1/2", sepal width 1 1/4", height of sepal 3 1/4". The plant is five years old and flowered in June 1943. --- Exhibited by Duke Farms, Somerville, N.J.

The first supplement to the *Register of Awards* initiated a breakthrough by publishing a picture of the awarded plant as well as a glowing description that would hold up even by today's standards:

REGIONAL MONTHLY JUDGING, HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA
JANUARY 9, 1956

Laeliocattleya Bonanza 'Giant', A.M. (80 points)
(Cavalese x C. Prospector)

One flower of a pleasing rose-lavender, remarkable form and excellent substance and texture. Deep rose lip with yellow throat and frilled margin.

Natural spread of flower 7 1/4"; dorsal sepal 1 3/8" wide, 4 1/4" long; petals 3 1/2" wide, 4" long; lower sepals 1 3/8" wide, 3 1/2" long; lip 3" wide, 4" long. – Exhibited by B. O. Bracey & Co., Santa Ana, California.

With the advent of the Awards Quarterly in 1970, the tools available to each judge included measurements plus descriptions which were accurate but in some cases incomplete.

Today's judges now are concentrating on recording complete flower and plant descriptions. These will serve as valuable references for plant comparisons in future evaluations. The judge who fails to consider all available print media before granting an award is not keeping step with the current philosophy of orchid judging.

One of the prime responsibilities of judging chairmen at regional meetings and especially at shows is to ensure that a more-than-adequate amount of reference material is available to the judges. The absence or presence of this reference material will directly affect the quality and accuracy of the judging and subsequent decision whether or not to grant an award.

With modern computer technology coming into more common usage, future judges may well be able to retrieve material (including pictures) at a rapid rate, assuring more available time for due consideration and decision-making.

Every judge occasionally indulges in self-evaluation. When recognizing flowers and plants for superiority and distinctive qualities, each judge must decide to assess today's plants and flowers by today's method.