

Standards in Judging Paphiopedilums

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The seventh edition of the American Orchid Society's *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* provides A.O.S. judges with specific criteria for judging paphiopedilums (Section 6.1.6, Page 38). A critical review of this section leads the reader to conclude that present standards for *Paphiopedilum* judging apply more to "complex" or "teacup" *Paphiopedilum* hybrids, many generations removed from the original species, than to *Paphiopedilum* species, most primary hybrids, and a few complex hybrids having the general appearance of species.

These two groups differ significantly in morphology. The first group, the so-called "teacup" paphiopedilums, usually have a very large dorsal sepal. This is often the most prominent part of the flower. The petals can be large but are often relatively narrow and are sometimes infolded. Viewed from the front, the synsepal is often diminutive and not visible behind the pouch; the long axis of the petals is often perpendicular to the dorsal sepal. Complex hybrids sometimes have a concave appearance and are often waxy in texture and heavy in substance.

The species or "species-like" group may not have a dominant dorsal sepal, either in morphology or color. Usually, the petals are relatively narrow but vary dramatically, depending on the section of the genus. For example, the subgenus *Brachypetalum* has dominant petals that are usually the most striking portion of the flower in shape and color. The petals are usually drooping and may be very elongated, although there is considerable variability depending on the species. Multiple-flowering inflorescences also are not uncommon, particularly in the subgenus *Polyantha*, previously known as the subgenus *Anotopetalum*.

Representatives of the so-called "teacup" group often share common ancestry in different proportions. Certain *Paphiopedilum* species seem to be inordinately prominent in the background of these complex hybrids. These species include *Paphiopedilum charlesworthii*, *P. insigne*, *P. druryi*, *P. spicerianum*, *P. exul*, *P. gratixianum*, and *P. villosum*. Upon reviewing this group, it becomes apparent that most of these species are present within the subgenus *Paphiopedilum*, section *Paphiopedilum*, section *Cymatopetalum*, and section *Thiopetalum*. A review of *The Orchid Stud Book*, an excellent early compilation of hybrids published in 1909, indicates that *Paphiopedilum* hybrids were, indeed, very popular during that time. It is surprising to see the number of species utilized in hybridizing then. *The Orchid Stud Book* shows that many popular hybrids being awarded today are remakes of very old crosses. In addition, hybridizers of that period did not restrict their activities to "teacup" hybrids but also made primary hybrids and other "species-like" crosses. Extensive use of the subgenus *Brachypetalum* is noted. A review of recent awards reveals that A.O.S. judges still find excellent forms of these old hybrids very appealing. *Paphiopedilum* Goultenianum (*callosum* x *curtisii*) and *Paphiopedilum* Gowerianum (*curtisii* x *lawrenceanum*) are two good examples. Both of these hybrids were made in the 1890s.

Over the years since the late 1800s, orchid judging has become more formalized. Attempts to codify judging practices, standards, and rules for evaluating *Paphiopedilum* species and hybrids evolved. A glance at the last several editions of the A.O.S. *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* indicates rather stable instructions. Furthermore, careful study of these guidelines shows that many of the characteristics displayed by the “teacup” group would appear to fulfill the criteria more perfectly than the group of “species-like” hybrids. Reference to the seventh *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* indicates the following desirable characteristics in judging *Paphiopedilum* species and hybrids: “The general form is toward roundness and fullness with particular emphasis on balance and proportion.” The *Paphiopedilum* point score sheet allocates 40% (40 points) for form. Half of this score is for “general form” (20 points). The dorsal sepal and synsepal are allotted 10 points, or 25% of the total score on the form. “The dorsal sepal should be large, rounded, slightly concave, and not reflexed. The ventral sepal, or synsepalum, should afford a harmonious background for the pouch.” The petals, however, may be given only up to 5 points of the total score for form. “The petals should be broad and not too long, in proportion to the rest of the flower.” No specific instructions are given in the seventh edition of the *Handbook* in regard to form or color of the pouch. A look at the sixth edition of the *Handbook* indicates that the sentence “The pouch should be in proportion to the rest of the flower” was deleted in the seventh edition.

The *Handbook* states, “The color of the flower should be definite in well-defined areas and patterns. Due to polyploidy, substance in paphiopedilums generally is heavy and now is accepted with little consideration of this feature. Texture should be waxy or varnished in the petals and pouch. The stem should be proportionately long and strong in relation to the size of the flower. *Size is based on width of the dorsal sepal*, (my emphasis) and the proportion of the rest of the flower to this measurement, according to breeding.”

Although these guidelines allow for some degree of variation, it is apparent that the “teacup” paphiopedilums conform to this description more than the species and “species-like” group. Since a full spectrum of hybridizing lines has been available since the early days orchid judging, it would appear that the A.O.S. guidelines for *Paphiopedilum* judging for merit favor the “teacup” group. The species and hybrids of the subgenus *Brachypetalum* often demonstrate a round and full figure but do have a relatively diminutive dorsal sepal, with petals being more prominent and important in shape and coloration. Is this characteristic less desirable than a dominant dorsal sepal?

The guidelines with regard to the length of petals seem inappropriate to species and hybrids of the subgenus *Polyantha*, whose graceful, narrow, or corkscrewing petals enhance the appearance of the flower. This, of course, does not provide a rounder or fuller flower. It seems unfair to penalize members of this group because their petals are too long. It would appear that the author’s intention with reference to the length of the petals was to advocate proportionately short petals not extending beyond the relatively circular form of the “teacup”-type hybrid.

Although polyploidy is present in some species, it is not as inbred in the species and “species-like” group as it is in the “teacup” group. Many beautiful *Paphiopedilum* species and hybrids do not have a waxy appearance but rather a ciliate, crystalline, or matte-appearing texture. Are these characteristics any less desirable than a waxy texture?

It should be noted that the guidelines as published in Section 6.1.6 in the seventh *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* emphasize the importance of utilizing the dorsal sepal as a measurement of width. This would have the tendency to encourage hybridizing with the “teacup” types to achieve a very circular form brought about by overlapping between the dorsal sepal and petals. Is this more desirable than the graceful, arching and narrow petals of *Paphiopedilum stonei*, *P. rothschildianum*, or allied species and hybrids?

Although the large score for general form (20 points of the 40 points) allows some degree of flexibility, those species and “species-like” hybrids that have prominent petals would be short-changed since they can only attain a maximum of 10 points on form, assuming a perfect score. Thus, if the judging score sheet is rigidly followed, these types of species and hybrids might be expected to be somewhat underscored relative to the “teacup” form for which the *Paphiopedilum* score sheet seems designed. In addition, although the size of the flower is allowed 10 points, there is no score given for floriferousness. Does the judge ignore this important characteristic of the subgenus *Polyantha* or does he increase by a few points his score on general form or color to make up the perceived difference? Upon review of the various generic point scales, the *Paphiopedilum* scale is unique in that 10 more points than usual are allocated for both form and color. Since it appears that the *Paphiopedilum* scale is somewhat weighted in favor of the “teacup” group, several questions arise.

In 1984, do judges or growers have a preference for “teacup” hybrids or “species-like” hybrids? This is a difficult and subjective question. One means of gaining some idea of modern trends in hybridizing as well as awards-judging is to look through issues of the *Awards Quarterly* at *Paphiopedilum* awards. A review of the *Awards Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3, through *Awards Quarterly*, Volume 15, Number 2, gives a broad sample. Approximately 80% of the *Paphiopedilum* awards had a black-and-white photograph published with the awards description. Thus, viewing the awards with an accompanying photograph will allow separation of the awarded plants into either 1) the “teacup/complex” hybrid group or 2) the species or “species-like” hybrids, which include a) the species, b) primary hybrids, c) third-generation hybrids derived from one species and a primary hybrid as parents, and d) complex hybrids having more the appearance of the species than of the “teacup” group. Almost twice as many awards were given to the species/”species-like” group when compared to the “teacup” group. The “teacup” group consisted of one First Class Certificate, 22 Awards of Merit, and 42 Highly Commended Certificates, with a total of 65 awards published during that period. One hundred twenty-three awards were given to species, primary hybrids, and “species-like” hybrids during the same period. This group consisted of one F.C.C., 35 A.M.s, and 87 H.C.C.s Of this group, approximately 20% of the awards were given to species, 46% to primary hybrids, 20% to third-generation hybrids, and 14% to complex “species-like” hybrids. It would seem from this review that paphiopedilums are popular with growers, hybridizers, and American Orchid Society judges. If these findings represent modern trends, with the species and “species-like” group receiving almost twice as many awards as the “teacup” group, why do the *Handbook* criteria for judging paphiopedilums favor the “teacup” group?

Interestingly, on Page 46 on the seventh *Handbook of Orchid Judging and Exhibition*, the figure given to display the parts of the *Paphiopedilum* flower again reflects the “teacup” group.

Should the guidelines as described in the *Handbook* be changed to reflect more accurately modern judging and hybridizing trends? Should the *Paphiopedilum* point scale be changed to reflect more accurately flower proportions found in the species and “species-like” hybrids? I would propose this subject be reviewed carefully by the A.O.S. Committee on Awards.

I believe by making slight changes in the proportion of points allocated to various portions of the *Paphiopedilum* flower, a more balanced point scale for judging paphiopedilums would result. This could be achieved by keeping the general categories of form and color both unchanged at 40 points each. However, a shift of 5 points from general form and color to the form and color of the petals would seem prudent. Thus, 15 points would be given for general form and color, 10 points for sepal form or color, and 10 points for petal form or color. The points allocated to the other categories would remain unchanged. The addition of the term “floriferousness” could be combined with size of the flower for the 10 points previously allotted for size of the flower alone. Although there are many pros and cons to evaluate in making decisions in this area, given the trends present in the published record of awards over the past year, it would appear that there may be sufficient grounds for reconsidering 6.1.6, “Criteria for Judging Paphiopedilums” and the *Paphiopedilum* point scale as discussed above.