Strap-leaf Vandas
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In asking how much improvement seems to have been made in strap-leaf vandas over the past dozen years, I felt that answers to lie within the *Awards Quarterly* and the records it presents. I studied all issues since its inception in 1970, with some trepidation, particularly after Dick Peterson's lecture last November when he maintained "that the written record of our judgments, with a number of exceptions, is almost totally useless in the comparative evaluation of flowers and plants, which principle forms the backbone of our judging system." My objective was to try to find some of these exceptions. I believe I did, but I also became a true believer in Dick's crusade to raise the quality of award descriptions.

Among the questions I set out to address were the following: **1)** Has the average number of flowers per inflorescence of awarded vandas increased (floriferousness is 10 points on the A.O.S. judging scale)? The answer is no. Does this surprise you? **2)** Has the average size of the flower increased (another 10 points on the scale)? The answer again is no, and here I am in some disagreement with William D. Burke and his statement, in his excellent article in the *Awards Quarterly*, Volume 13, Number 2, "A Judge's View of Vandas and Ascocendas," that "… the average size of an awarded *Vanda* hybrid flower has gone up every year …." While I share Mr. Burke's concern that judges may tend to give more weight to flower size than the point scale specifies, that fear does not, fortunately, seem to be confirmed by the records.

3) Has the shape of the flower, in terms of "roundness" and symmetry, improved in any measurable way? The answer is a definite yes. **4)** Has flower shape, in terms of "flatness" or reduced cupping, improved? The award descriptions shed little light on this. They could and should. (All the elements of *Vanda* flower shape, by the way, have a combined total weight of 30 points on the appropriate judging scale.) **5)** Has the flower arrangement improved, and have the inflorescences become longer? (Habit and arrangement of the inflorescence account for 10 points.) Unfortunately, the awards descriptions are usually woefully inadequate on habit and arrangement of the inflorescence — in fact, completely silent in most instances. They should not be. Many vandas tend to have their flowers somewhat disconcertingly bunched and crowded together, and hybridizers have been trying to overcome this characteristic as much as possible. The award descriptions should help us to determine whether they are making progress in this respect. Brief comment on flower habit and arrangement should therefore be part of most award descriptions. It seldom has been. 6) Are there indications that there have been substantial improvements in coloration, markings, texture and substance (together these account for a large 40% of the total judging points)? All too few descriptions say anything very meaningful about these qualities. I recognize that, for the most part, these are rather subjective qualities and therefore are difficult to describe. Even so, the award descriptions could be much better in this respect than they have been. Significant advances in these areas have arisen, particularly out of Thailand, and our written record suffers greatly if little or no attention is given to such advances whenever they appear in plants that have been deemed worthy of awards. **7)** Have certain crosses dominated in the winning of awards? The answer is yes, and the subject of a possible future paper. Numerous, detailed tables and charts

accompany my subsequent statements. Unfortunately space does not permit their duplication here. I shall therefore attempt to generalize these tables in my remarks. The data I uncovered was divided into three time intervals as expressed by 1) the years covered by Volumes 1 through 6 of the *Awards Quarterly*, or, roughly, awards granted during 1969-1974; 2) the years covered by Volumes 7-11, or roughly 1975-1979; and 3) the years covered by Volumes 12-14, Number 2, which contain awards granted in 1980-1982. Most of the comparisons I shall be relaying are between the earliest period and the most recent one. In the first period, my data covers 86 awards, in the final period 78 awards. In addition, I excluded all awards to *Vanda* species other than to *Vanda sanderiana* and *V. coerulea*, and I did not include C.C.M.- or C.H.M.-awarded vandas, concentrating only on flower quality.

1) *Average number of flowers and buds per inflorescence*: — The median number of flowers and buds in both the first time period and the last was 12. Moreover, the share of total awards going to the group with the smallest amount of flowers did not shrink. Indeed, its share rose substantially from 12% to 17%. In both periods, as one might expect, awarded plants with more flowers were more likely to have received an A.M. instead of an H.C.C., than awarded vandas having fewer flowers. My data confirm this. The more flowers, the higher percentage of A.M.'s. Those who believe that "more is better" might also have expected that nowadays a vanda having only 5 to 9 flowers per inflorescence, if lucky enough to be awarded at all, would be more likely to receive an H.C.C. rather than the A.M. that would have been the case some years previously. Actually, the share of total A.M.'s going to that group doubled, from 5% to 12%. Judges, quite appropriately in my opinion, appear not to be excessively influenced by sheer number of flowers. It would seem that judges, in general, do apply the 10% weight that the A.O.S. scale establishes for floriferousness but do not overly penalize a plant with fewer flowers. In vandas, as in architecture, Mies van der Rohe's "Less is more" can be true — on occasion.

2) *Size of flower*: — The average size of flowers is no greater in the most recent period than in the earliest period, as my data from the *Awards Quarterly* reveal. Indeed, the average size has shrunk a little, though not significantly. As one might expect, the average size of flowers receiving an A.M. was larger, in both periods, than that of those receiving an H.C.C., and the difference was wider in the most recent time period. A surprising piece of information which came to light: the average flower size has not tended to decline steadily as the number of flowers on the inflorescence has increased. If anything, the opposite has occurred. I had expected a fairly persistent trade-off between the size of flowers and the number of flowers per inflorescence, on the average.

3) *Shape of flower*: — One aesthetic shortcoming of most vandas of some years ago was that their petals were too long in relation to their width, and the overall size of the petal was not large enough in relation to the overall size of the flower itself. Both of these shortcomings detracted from the appearance of "roundness" and symmetry. The data reveal a clear improvement in these respects recently. As a reasonable standard today, I would say, admittedly somewhat arbitrarily, that we should expect a good *Vanda* flower to have a petal length no more than10% greater than the petal width. If the petals are to be large enough in relationship to the overall size of the flower, I would say that petal width should be at least 45% of the natural spread. Of course, there are additional

proportions one could apply if one wished to make use of all the petal and sepal measurements available, but I think the ones I have mentioned will do.

How many of the 164 awarded vandas I reviewed met my minimum criteria about petal length-to-width and also petal size to overall size of the flower? During the 1969-1974 period, only 19% of the 86 plants reviewed satisfied both requirements. In the 1980-1982 period, on the other hand, the results were strikingly superior — 49% of the 78 vandas passed both tests. These two tests, of course, have to do with petal proportions and make no allowance for petal size and hence overall flower size, in absolute terms. But absolute size is also important. I believe that a criterion of 4.5 centimeters or more is reasonable for petal width. Only 12% of the vandas reviewed in the first period satisfied this additional requirement, while 41% did in the most recent period. If one raises the absolute petal-width standard to 5.0 centimeters or more, then only a third of the first period's 12% stayed in the game, as against three-fifth's of the 41% recorded in the later period, and half of these, in turn, surpassed both of the ratio tests by a wide margin. So at last the *Awards Quarterly* data reveal a measurable improvement in vandas over the time periods described in size of petal, both relatively and absolutely, even though the average size of the flower overall did not increase; in fact, as I previously said, it declined slightly. Today's best vandas do have much greater symmetry and give the impression of greater roundness and fullness. I should mention that the analysis I made would have been easier and somewhat more accurate if the award description required both horizontal and vertical measurements of spread. Few descriptions did this. If the outline of the petals is "pointy" at their outer ends, or, at the inner half, appears to be angular or "tennis-racket-handle" shaped, these characteristics should be mentioned. These are all-too-frequently-seen shortcomings that appear in the awards photography. While the petal length-to-width ratio will often provide a good clue to these defects, it does not alw3ays do so, hence the need for accurate award descriptions.

4) *Recent trends in Vanda hybridizing*: — During the past few years, Thailand has replaced Hawaii and Florida as the leading source of *Vanda* hybrids, only relatively few of which are appearing on the judging tables, judging from the *Awards Quarterly* records. The Thai breeders have made great progress in the width and size of the petals and, particularly, in the vibrancy, clarity and range of colors and hues combined with sparkling texture. And lastly, they seem to be moving further away from the typical *Vanda sanderiana* pattern of two-toned coloration and are achieving more uniform and striking coloration and markings. The progress during the past 5 or 6 years has been really impressive. During numerous visits to Thailand over the past 7 to 8 years, I have seen vibrant colors and hues that scarcely existed previously, not only in the collections of famous Bangkok growers but also in the up-country areas where most of the vandas actually are raised and flowered.

With this aside, I do want to make one final comment. Strap-leaf vandas can be grown well in greenhouses in less than brilliantly sunny areas, and at *Phalaenopsis* and *Cattleya* temperatures! I would like to see more growers include the latest *Vanda* hybrids in their collections and bring the best ones into their respective judging centers.