

Judging Modern Zygopetalum Hybrids

By Ned Nash

Published in September 1998, Vol. 29, No. 3 Awards Quarterly

There is a lack of unanimity in the American Orchid Society judging community when it comes to defining what constitutes an award-quality *Zygopetalum*. Witness the four plants pictured on the back cover of this issue of *Awards Quarterly*. Is it enough that the flowers are larger than others of similar breeding? That the colors are clearer and markings more definite? That the lip is more boldly hued? Or should judges also demand the same relative flatness and fullness of segments, floriferousness, good carriage, and lack of blemishes that they demand in other horticulturally important genera? Personal experience, as well as consultation with some of the most experienced judges familiar with this type of orchid, seems to give a resounding "yes" in answer to the last question. If a judge feels compelled to use a particular point scale in scoring zygopetalums, consensus has it that either the *odontoglossum* point scale, which is appropriate for flowers having floral parts just about equally important, or the general point scale should be used. A few facts and observations should help elucidate the criteria that might be best applied to judging this group of attractive orchids.

There are relatively few species contributing to hybrids in the genus *Zygopetalum*.

Among them are *Zygopetalum intermedium*, *Zygopetalum mackayi*, *Zygopetalum maxillare* and *Zygopetalum crinitum* (in no particular order). Three of these --

Zygopetalum intermedium, *Zygo. Mackayi* and *Zygo. Crinitum* – are commonly confused by hobbyists. One of them, *Zygo. Mackayi*, should never be used as the capsule parent, because it often produces plants of *Zygo. Mackayi* rather than the intended hybrid. (I am told that *Zygopetalum* B.G. White can act in the same way.) Only *Zygo. maxillare* is significantly different, both in growth habit and in flower shape, where it will contribute flatness and fullness to flower shape, although often with an elongated rhizome. Thus, we can expect generally similar flowers, with green sepals and petals overlaid with varying degrees of cordovan markings that may suffuse to nearly cover the surface, and a full, blue-veined lip held at 90 degrees to the column. The segments should be flat and full, with little or no recurring. Short spikes with few flowers should not be tolerated unless the plant is heavily influenced by *Zygo. maxillare*. Carriage and spike habit should be generally erect and well clear of the foliage. Fragrance, while not a scoreable feature, is a definite plus if retained in the hybrid. A significant fault mentioned by one judge is the white V-shaped blemish left on the lip by folding in the bud stage (he called it a "fatal flaw").

Intergeneric hybrids involving zygopetalums require a different set of guidelines. These lines of breeding are still in their infancy, and many of the hybrids you are liable to see will be primary hybrids, where the *Zygopetalum* parent is almost sure to dominate. More complex hybrids will more often than not be bred back to the *Zygopetalum* parent, leading to an even greater degree of influence, as in the two illustrated on the back cover, which are really little influenced by the *Colax jugosus* grandparent. Expect to see an increasing number of this type being exhibited, especially those intergeneric hybrids with other members of this group such as *Colax*, *Bollea*, *Cochleanthes* and *Warscewiczella*, among others. All can be judged, with either the same standards applied to zygopetalums, or by judicious use of the *odontoglossum* or general point scale. Do the research to see

what else has been recognized. Don't be afraid to ignore previous awards if you feel it prudent, either by scoring low something you feel lacks merit, or by recognizing a new trend that has the beauty that appeals. However, always remember, "new" carries no points on any score sheet.

Ned Nash was director of education and conservation at the American Orchid Society.