As a student and probationary judge, I have done a great deal of listening to the comments and opinions of other judges as a learning tool. Most of the time the comments are accurate, to the point and it is pretty clear when a plant might be awarded or passed. There are other times when opinions are varied and a consensus is difficult to reach. These varying opinions are sometimes surprising. There may be merit to each opinion, but I have sometimes wondered if the best decision was reached in judging these plants.

The following scenarios include actual comments made about a plant presented for judging. In each case, one of the options presented was the final decision of the judging team. In some cases, the decision was that which one would least expect (or alternatively, the decision was the one I least expected). An exhibitor might ask for comments at the end of judging about his or her plant. He or she may not be familiar with the judging process. Will our explanations sound reasonable or will they just leave the exhibitor wondering? There are many times when our decisions and comments are based on years of doing things a certain way, but sometimes we might need to look outside the box at other possible solutions. There may not always be just one right outcome for every plant judged.

As you go through each scenario, select the option you would have chosen. The actual outcomes appear at the article's end.

SCENARIO 1 The team was presented with a species plant that had 22 inflorescences of 30 to 40 cm in length, and had from 20 to 28 flowers per inflorescence. This plant was in a 14-cm pot, well grown with leaves of 10 to 12 cm in length. The flowers were yellow-green with maroon stripes. Included with this plant was taxonomic verification from an AOS-recognized authority as to its identity. The awards research showed a previous award to this species — a CHM. The awarded plant had 40 flowers and four buds on nine inflorescences that ranged from 14 to 18.5 cm in length. It was also well-grown, mounted on cork bark, with leaves 6 to 7.5 cm in length. The color of the awarded flowers was yellow-green without markings. It was awarded for its "robust vegetative growth and its floriferousness." The published taxonomic documentation indicated that the inflorescences are "many-flowered"…"to 35 cm long," the leaves are "6 to 9 cm long" and the flower color is "yellow-green." What would you have recommended for this plant?

1. Do nothing and pass? It is not a showy species, not likely be used for hybridizing and there is already a CHM to document the species.
2. Consider it for a quality award? If a showy hybrid or plant was brought to judging with as many superior qualities as this one had relative to the previous award, it would definitely be considered for a quality award.
3. Consider another CHM, noting not only the superior qualities displayed by this plant, but that it is more representative of, and even exceeds the species

taxonomic description in size and floriferousness? So many times when we see a species plant for the first time, we may not be looking at a good representative of the species. That may have been true in this particular case, and in addition, there were color variations. What better way to ensure that judges will know what this species is capable of for future awards than to consider documenting this plant in addition to the previous plant?

SCENARIO 2 The team was presented with a well-grown, well-flowered plant that could be considered for a CCM. This plant had 28 flowers and 19 buds on a 17-cm plant. This plant had a clonal name and a previous CCM award to that clonal name of 88 points. This award indicated the plant had 22 flowers and 27 buds on a 17-cm plant at the time of the award. What would you have recommended for this plant?

1. Do nothing and pass because this blooming was not significantly better than the previous CCM?
2. Determine if the person who presented this plant for judging was different from the person who previously received the CCM. Since a CCM is awarded to the grower, this grower should also be considered for a CCM for growing it well.

SCENARIO 3 The team was presented with a well-grown, well-flowered plant that could be eligible for a CCM. It had 22 flowers. The leaves on this plant were uniformly arranged around the pot. Nearly all growths had flowers, but most of the flowers were facing toward one side of the plant. What would you have recommended for this plant?

1. Do nothing and pass because this plant did not display its flowers evenly around the plant.
2. Consider it for a CCM, as nearly all growths had flowers.

SCENARIO 4 The team was presented with a well-grown species plant that had nothing but the genus name on it. The team agreed that it did appear to be a member of that genus, but could not find any documentation to determine what species it might be. What would you have recommended for this plant?

1. Award this plant a CBR or CHM and leave it up to the taxonomist to determine what it is. (If you use this option, the award may have to be nullified if the plant turns out to be something previously awarded.)
2. Ask the exhibitor to get it identified and bring it back again on another blooming.

SCENARIO 5 Two different plants of the same species were each awarded a CHM on the same day in different locations. It was determined that only one of the CHM awards could stand. The color, size and flower count were not significantly different on either plant. However, plant A displayed its flowers crisply and flat, while plant B had flowers that were not quite so desirable. Which plant would you choose to keep the award?

1. Let the award stand for plant A because it had superior form.

2. Let the award stand for plant B with the reasoning that plant A looked so good it could always be brought back to judging for a possible quality award at a later date.

WHAT THE JUDGING TEAM DID

Scenario 1: Option 1
Scenario 2: Option 1
Scenario 3: Option 1
Scenario 4: Option 1
Scenario 5: Option 2

Were some of these decisions surprising to you? They are definitely food for thought.