

Revised Guidelines for AOS Awards Photographers

The following suggestions are intended not only to help new AOS Awards Photographers but to provide a measure of consistency across the judging program. A useful guide when setting up an award photograph is to ask yourself this question, “Will this photograph accurately describe the orchid and the qualities for which it was awarded?” That is the basis of all AOS awards photography.

- If unsure about which flower, inflorescence, or part of inflorescence best represents the award given, consult a member of the judging team that gave the award.
- All photography of CCM and CCE awarded plants must include the whole plant.
- Flower-quality awards (HCC, AM, FCC, JC, AD) should include at least one flower facing the camera straight on, centered in and dominating the frame in the case of single- or several-flowered inflorescences (i.e., Cattleya, Paphiopedilum, standard Phalaenopsis, etc.). Photography of multifloral orchids (i.e. Ascocenda, Dendrobium, Oncidium, etc.) should include enough of the inflorescence to clearly illustrate the aspect and arrangement of the flowers as well as have at least one flower facing the camera straight on. If unsure, consult a judge.
- Botanical awards (CBR, CHM) should have at least one flower centered and facing the camera straight on but also show enough of the inflorescence to accurately illustrate the aspect of the inflorescence. In some cases, showing part of the plant may be warranted. If unsure, consult a judge.
- Properly labeled slides or digital images are **required** of plants and flowers that receive the following AOS awards: FCC, AM, HCC, AD, AQ, JC, CCE, CCM, CHM and CBR.
- Photographs are **not required** of plants and flowers that receive the following AOS awards: Artistic Certificate, Certificate of Meritorious Arrangement, Educational Exhibit Certificate, Gold Certificate, and Show Trophy.
- Frame photograph carefully and use vertical or horizontal composition as appropriate to the inflorescence.
- Whenever possible (do not risk damaging the plant or inflorescence), remove stakes, hoops, ties, name tags or any other distracting mechanical elements. Use masking tape to gently pull unsightly leaves out of the picture area.

- Use a plain background that provides contrast yet complements the flowers being photographed. Neutral or earth tones work the best. Avoid bright colors or backgrounds with distinct patterns. Place the background at least 18-inches behind the subject to minimize shadows, wrinkles, seams etc. This is especially important if using fabric that has been folded. Fabric backgrounds should be rolled around a cylinder to prevent wrinkles.
- Use balanced lighting to prevent harsh shadows. That is, there should be a primary light source to render form and a secondary light source to fill in shadows. The use of softening devices such as umbrellas and soft boxes is recommended. If using only a single light source, be sure to soften it by bounce or diffusion and use a white card to fill shadows.
- Do not rely on auto-focus cameras; visually confirm correct focus.
- Use the smallest f-stop possible for the lighting and film you are using. This will ensure that there is sufficient depth-of-field to render flowers sharply. Depth-of-field roughly extends 1/3 in front of and 2/3 behind the point of focus, so focus near the front of your subject. Posing small flowers so that as much of the flower as possible is on the same plane, and parallel to the film plane will minimize depth-of-field requirements.
- Use a tripod!
- If using flash with an older non-auto camera, be sure that your shutter speed is set to synchronize with the flash.
- Determine exposure for each award you photograph; do not use the same settings for all awards in a session. Different flowers may require different exposures.
- Each award should be photographed as a digital image as specified in the attached digital photography requirements or, as a set of five slides as follows: 3 “best-exposure” slides, one slide at minus - ½ f-stop and one slide at plus + ½ f-stop
- An FCC is a very special, rarely given award. If you are called on to photograph one, take extra time to set it up perfectly. Shoot extra images using different poses and exposures just to be sure.
- Digital images must be properly identified, and slides must be properly labeled. If your agreement includes labeling the award slides, be sure that you have all the information you need to do this before you leave the exhibit hall or judging center.
- If shooting digital, image files of awarded orchids should be named using the award number as assigned at the time of judging. Be sure you get this information from the judging chair, secretary or show chair. You may add copyright and award & exhibitor information in the file metadata fields if you wish.

- If shooting film, slides of awarded orchids should be labeled with the slide upside down, right-side facing as it would be loaded into a projector tray. A dot to facilitate tray loading should be put in the upper right-hand corner. The following information must appear on every award slide: genus, plant name, clonal name, award given, point score, parentage (if hybrid), exhibitor name, place and date award was given. The photographer's credit should be put on the other side of the slide, appearing exactly as it should be published.
- The AOS will not pay for any show awards photography. It is the responsibility of show chairs of AOS-judged shows to hire and pay an awards photographer. The AOS will reimburse Judging Center Photographers only for film and processing costs for properly exposed, focused slide sets when a receipt for such expenses is accompanied by a signed Request for Reimbursement Form. Any additional compensation should be arranged with the Judging Center.

GRAYSCALE FAQ

Q. Am I required to use a grayscale?

A. No. At this time the use of a grayscale is encouraged, but not mandatory.

Q. How do I use the grayscale?

A. The scale should be placed in the frame of your first, best-guess exposure. Be sure to include all the shades of gray in the slide but also try to place the scale in an inconspicuous part of the frame where it may be cropped out if necessary. **Do not** shoot the whole slide set with the gray scale.

Q. Will my slides look better if I use a grayscale?

A. No. The gray scale will not make you a better photographer. Your slides will only look as good as your skills at making them. The gray scale will not change the way your slides look one bit.

Q. Why are we supposed to use the grayscale then?

A. In the event that there is a slide that **must** be reproduced and there is no bracketed slide that is correctly exposed, the gray scale will facilitate a more accurate color separation. Grayscale slides will only be used to rescue poorly exposed images, not for all color separations.

NOTES TO JUDGING CHAIRS

Unless there is a familiar object placed in a photograph, cameras cannot show size. If assisting a photographer in arriving at a pose for an award photograph, take this fact into consideration. Often the largest flower on an inflorescence is the flower scored but not necessarily the best flower for an award record because of distracting elements behind it, minor mechanical flaws or awkward composition. Flowers to be photographed should be chosen for their form, color and composition, not size.

Judging teams are advised to touch flowers minimally (such as when measuring) until after the award photographs are completed. Excessive feeling of flowers for texture can result in damaged tissue. Acid and oils on the hands can damage flowers and result in unsatisfactory award photographs. This is especially important with single-flowered awarded plants.

At shows and centers where the photographer accepts responsibility for labeling award slides, the photographer will have the right to return any slides unlabeled when the photographer's copy of the Judging Entry Form is illegible, incomplete or inaccurate. It will then be the chair's responsibility to have the slides labeled. Please be sure that your teams print clearly and press hard – there are three copies.

After monthly judging is over, exhibitors are usually anxious to take their awarded plants and go home. Please encourage exhibitors to allow award photographers ample, undisturbed time to do their job properly. It can be distracting to photograph a difficult orchid when there is a group of anxious exhibitors gathered around the photography set-up.

Further information on photographing orchids may be found:

Awards Quarterly, Summer 1993 – Notes to an AOS Awards Photographer – Richard Fleig

Awards Quarterly, September 1998 -- The New Photography -- Pat Worthington, Ph.D.

AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition – Suggestions on Orchid Awards Photography

Orchid Photography - Charles Marden Fitch