

Some Thoughts on Award Descriptions

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Communications is one of the greatest challenges humans face.

As judges we are fortunate to deal with facts, and reporting our actions (i.e., award descriptions) in a clear, concise manner should be a reasonably straightforward process. However, the results often seem uncommunicative considering the amount of labor expended. Sometimes it is easier to say something esoterically impressive than to simply state it clearly. When giving the facts relating to what we observed in an orchid flower and how we scored it, shouldn't we say what we mean and say it as directly and communicatively as possible?

Dr. Kenneth Wilson states in the Training Aids Manual, "The purpose of any description is to put into the 'mind's eye' of another person a picture of what you [the judge] have experienced ... The description must be tailored to the award ..." A glowing description of the individual flower with no mention of the plant tells us little about a 94-point CCM (Certificate of Cultural Merit). A JC (Judges' Commendation) commending a flower "for unusual color" leaves the reader waiting for the essential information.

Since others refer to these assessments of awarded flowers as guides to possible future awards or to evaluating their own plants, it is important to use terms that are descriptive yet simple (not simplistic) and familiar (not everyone is an artist, a wine expert or botanist). Why do we labor so hard to "find the right word" that ends up having meaning to only a select few? Cochineal red* may mean something to a biologist but not to a stock broker.

Awards that "just miss" the next highest award, beg the question of why. So it would seem logical to offer some justification, either within the body of the description ("...15 slightly cupped flower somewhat irregularly space one inflorescence ...") or, as a closing comment ("...greater floriferousness and better presentation would have increased score ...") By the same reasoning, an FCC (First Class Certificate) warrants something more than just a routine description ("...outstanding conformation immediately commanded attention of those present ...")

An interesting statistic that we should keep in mind is that most Awards Quarterly readers are not judges. Out of approximately 3,500 subscribers, fewer than 20 percent are judges. Part of our judging commitment is to help growers learn more about flower quality and many of these readers are consulting the Awards Quarterly to learn what attributes constitute award quality for a particular plant. We cannot, and should not, expect them to

know quality in the same detail as we do. Our responsibility is to relate to them what we saw in Phalaenopsis X when we felt it was worthy of an award or what it was we were looking for in Paphiopedilum Y which received 79 points.

We are wholly responsible for the ultimate success or failure of our award descriptions, since the Awards Quarterly editors do not change the content/intent, only the format. The Awards Quarterly Stylebook has been issued to all judges and judging centers. Referring to it regularly can help us write our descriptions in nearer-to-publishable form, reduce the amount of editing and help us to communicate.

A glance through the description-writing section of the Training Aids Manual reveals many good thoughts and approaches to be considered by all judges, not just trainees. Some "nutshell" guides to the basics are reprinted here for quick reference.

*The dictionary defines cochineal as red dye consisting of dried female cochineal insects used as a biological stain.

Description Basics

General Sequence of Descriptions

1. Vegetative parts and culture
2. Inflorescences(s) and flower(s)
3. Comments

Sequence of Floral Parts

(number of flowers, buds and inflorescences are part of entry form)

Most Genera

Paphiopedilum

Form-Arrangement-Presentation Form-Arrangement-Presentation

General Flower Color

General Flower Color

Dorsal Sepal

Dorsal Sepal

Lateral Sepals

Synsepal

Petals

Petals

Lip (incl. its parts)

Pouch

Spur	(N/A)
Column (incl. anther cap)	Staminode
Ovary	Ovary
Substance	Substance
Texture	Texture

Spelling

apices	overlaid
chartreuse	pendent
crystalline	raspberry
fuchsia	side lobes
hirsute	striped
iridescent	tessellation
lavender	venation
midlobe	

Preferred Usage

Instead of

parentage	cross
dorsal sepal	dorsal
lip	labellum
pouch (in Paph.)	lip, labellum, slipper
margin(s) or edge(s)	periphery
anther cap	pollen cap

Preferred Usage

Instead of

ramicaul(s)

secondary stem(s)

parts

segments, tepals

sepaline caudae

sepaline tails

staminode (in Paph.)

shield

synsepal

synsepalum, ventral sepal

cauda(e)

tails

cultivar

variety

lateral sepals

ventral sepals

Use

Instead of

bars/barred,

-ing

edges/edged,

spots/spotted,

stripes/striped,

veins/veined, etc.

Numbers

one to nine

spell out

10 or greater,

write as a number (10, 12, etc.)

any number beginning a sentence,

spell out (One flower, Nine flowers, Twenty-one flowers,etc)

Compound Colors

Color modified by another

color, use hyphen:

yellow-green

Color modified by another

color ending in "-ish,"

yellowish green

Color modified by noun,

omit hyphen:

grass green

Color modified by noun

which is itself a color,

omit hyphen:

lime green

EXCEPTION: orange and

rose, hyphenate

orange-red, rose-red