

Lateral Awarding of Orchids
By Jo Boudinot

Over the past six years that I have been in the AOS Judging program, while judging from different areas, I found a difference in attitudes toward the lateral awarding of orchids. I thought it would be interesting to see if these differences of opinion would vary according to the location of the judging centers.

I sent a survey of four questions to accredited and probationary judging centers in each of the following states: California, Florida, Missouri, Ohio and Pennsylvania, for a total of 114 surveys with almost 34 percent returned. I tried to make my questions brief, but deliberately overlapped a little. I found that opinions did not vary as much from the different locations as they did from individual judges, regardless of where they lived. I have chosen a few answers from each Center that illustrate opposing or at least somewhat different points of view.

Surveys	Sent	Received
California	33	10
Florida	27	4
Missouri	15	11
Ohio	21	12
Pennsylvania	18	3
Total	114	40

Question One: *How do you interpret the term “Lateral Awarding”?*

From California:

“I don’t use the term. I thought this term had been put to bed many years ago.”

“Once a plant of a certain grex receives an award, the next plant of the same grex can only receive a higher award. If it is of similar or lesser quality, it would not be awarded.”

“If two flowers are exactly alike, both should be scored.”

“All plants should be judged by type and breeding. As a grex starts to get several awards, it is up to judges to increase the standards by which we judge. If the plant falls into the new range, award it.”

From Florida:

“Today I read the term for the first time.”

“Awarding more than one of the same hybrid.”

“I don’t believe in so-called lateral awards. Each plant should be judged on its own merits.”

From Missouri:

“I interpret this term in a rather derogatory sense. It seems to describe the willingness of judges to add to what is already an almost indigestible volume of recorded awards of a cultivar simply because it is ‘just another’ award for that cultivar. It is really inconceivable for me to accept the idea that there should be no limit to the number of awards.”

“Assigning an identical point score to one or more plants of the same grex is a literal interpretation. I have no objection to the concept. If a plant is AM quality, it is of AM quality. I do not believe that every award must carry a higher point score than the previous award to the same grex.”

From Ohio:

“This is the awarding of multiple clones of the same grex, usually more than seven or eight, especially of the same quality award (HCC, AM, rarely FCC).”

“The granting of equal or lower awards to a species or hybrid that has already been awarded many times.”

“Lateral awarding means giving a similar award-point repeatedly to plants. At what point is a lateral award simply representing ‘improved’ clones, and at what point is it demonstrating the average of what is expected?”

“Awarding multiple awards (such as AMs) to different clones of the same grex that are quite similar, but cannot be recognized for different color, form or shape.”

From Pennsylvania:

“Hasn’t been much talked about at our center.”

“We have not used the term ‘lateral awards,’ although I certainly understand what you are talking about. To use such a term can sometimes belittle a plant in the same way that certain judges use the term ‘fatal flaw.’ Our job is to serve the orchid-growing public. Each entry deserves our full attention and should not be thrown into a lateral award category.”

Question Two: *Do you feel that if a plant, species or hybrid, is good enough to receive an award, another plant with the same attributes should also receive an award? (Form, color, floriferousness, presentation of flowers and stem, size of flowers, substance and texture for a quality award. Form, color, size and condition of plant, blooms, robustness and floriferousness for a cultural award, or exhibiting outstanding esthetic appeal that contributes to the horticultural aspects of orchidology for a Horticultural award)*

From California:

“Yes, we are judging quality, not a race to the Judging Center. (Even races — dog, horse, stock car, human, etc., acknowledge second and third places.) We do a disservice to the judging system by limiting recognition of plants of quality that may not have the value of a higher award, but have value for themselves.”

“Unfortunately, like everything in judging — no matter how scientific one attempts to be — the answer must be qualified. Some quality and some cultural awards do need to be given to forms — cultivars similar to other awarded entities. It becomes a matter of aesthetics. For the vast majority of plants, consciously or subconsciously — the bar is raised and judges (myself included) look for something more or different. Some grexes are so similar, it would be preposterous to award clones that do not differ materially from one another.”

“Yes, you judge each plant, as you see it, on its own merits. You use previous award information to assist the process, not dictate it.”

From Florida:

“Yes, all deserve to be awarded if of equal quality.”

“Cultural Award — yes, maybe a slightly lower point score. I look for improvement. Quality award — maybe. If the previous award was 80 points, and the cross or species is the same, and then I would, under the AOS system, be reasonably comfortable. If it is the next generation — no, because where is the improvement? Some case could be made for giving an AM to the progeny of two FCCs if it equaled the two parents overall.”

From Missouri:

“Yes, except for CHM and CBR awards. We need only one of those.”

“Yes. If we only awarded flowers superior to the last award given, we would give precious few awards, and interest in the judging program would rapidly disappear. We cannot see or feel the plants from the previous awards; and written descriptions and slides are not able to convey to us all the characteristics of previous awards. We can still award high-quality flowers and the point score will give a rough approximation of how the flower in question relates in quality to others of the same type that were awarded recently.”

From Ohio:

“Yes and no. If there are many awards, I am less disposed toward a new lateral award, but always disposed toward a lateral in species where the *Awards Quarterly* is without photographic record. Cultural awards are to the grower, therefore I would not hesitate on Cultural awards. On Horticultural awards, always figure out something to get a picture in the *Awards Quarterly* if the previous award is without a picture.”

Yes, particularly as awarded plants tend to be used as parents in hybridizing. Many outstanding plants could be lost to the gene pool if awards are not given.”

“I own a plant of HCC quality, but when presented for judging it was not given an award because there were already 10 to 15 plants on record with similar or same score. As a plant owner, I felt the plant should have received an award. However, I understand that when 10–15 plants are on record, it may not make much sense to do so. The quality we are considering awardable is steadily improving. Thus, 75 points in 1975 is equal to fewer points today. In general, because of the moving target, I believe that if a plant compares favorably, we should still award it, because 75 in 2003 is better than 75 in 1975. My final answer is a reserved ‘yes.’”

From Pennsylvania:

“In theory, and per the *Handbook*, it should, but — it assumes all previous awards have been correct. Consider the first *Paphiopedilum armeniacum*. That quality can’t get an HCC today. *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum* ‘Charles Edwards’, AM/AOS, was a good award for its time, but with rediscovery and sipping, much better ones came along. In short — evolving standards mean that more discoveries and/or hybridizing raises the bar. But that means an AM of the 1960s might well not be an AM today. The *Handbook* doesn’t consider this — it is too fixated (as are many judges) on empirical standards, as if nothing ever changes, as if judges didn’t make mistakes. This is an ax I grind a lot (and I have published on it, both in *Orchids* and in my area of academia).”

“It depends on the evaluation for each flower (plant). Mediocre crosses rarely deserve multiple awards; the same with nonoutstanding species. Exceptional crosses and species deserve consideration for multiple awards.”

Question Three: Do you feel a plant must be an improvement over all previously awarded plants of the same species or hybrid?

From California:

“If you want to kill the AOS system of judging, this is a good way to do it. Since judging is not an exact science, but depends heavily on aesthetic appeal, there must be room in the system for individual response.”

“Plants must be an improvement over parents and/or better than expected results from breeding, but not an improvement over previous awards — that criterion is not relevant to quality.”

From Florida:

“Obviously not, but the level of previous awards comes into play here. If it isn’t an improvement over a previous low HCC, then forget it.”

“I guess no. How can you tell exactly how it compares? You have to judge what you see, but you can’t judge the photograph or description.”

From Missouri:

“Please remember that all awards are valid and valuable not only to the owner of the plant, but also to the judging community.”

“No, I believe in ‘lateral awards.’”

From Ohio:

“No, if a grex yields 10,000 clones, then mathematically, there should be a potential for 250 awardable clones, as opposed to a grex that produces 10 clones. Should a productive grex be punished for productivity? Do we want to discourage sibbing and selfing of a grex that can lead to finer forms?”

“Quality awards, no. How many awarded plants are no longer available (translation — dead)? If there are a few awards to a species or hybrid, the orchid hobby will benefit, availability will increase and at lower prices. It also may increase cross-breeding from different genetic pools that will benefit orchid conservation. Cultural awards should probably or always be at least as good generally, and extra interesting in some aspect.”

“I believe that over time the standards — the bar — must be raised. For example, striped *Phalaenopsis* of 20 to 30 years ago are a pale comparison to today’s hybrid. Should a poorly formed, weakly colored approximation of a stripe be given an HCC or AM today? Absolutely not, but 20 to 30 years ago, absolutely yes to encourage a new line of breeding.”

“No, if worthy of an award, it should be given one.”

From Pennsylvania:

“I think ‘improvement’ is a bad concept to use. But, taking it as it stands (bad word, bad rule), I suppose so.”

“No. Equivalent quality deserves an equivalent award, unless over time hybridizing has produced superior flowers for the type of orchid.”

Question Four: *If you feel a species or hybrid must be an improvement over all previous awarded plants of the same species or hybrid, and that species or hybrid has received an FCC award, should higher FCCs be the only award to any plant of that species or hybrid?*

From California:

“I don’t feel this way, and a judge that does should retire. There is a lot of room under 90 points.”

“No, not necessarily. A lower FCC could be awarded.”

“I have no hesitation giving HCCs or AMs to species or hybrids that have FCC clones — witness all the clones of *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum*. I would probably hesitate to proliferate awards to less spectacular species or crosses. This is probably inconsistent with the scoring system, but seems to me to be an example of good judgment. Just because a flower is good — an award does not have to be given in every situation, but only in some. Emerson — “Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” The natural raising of the bar that occurs when judges have seen many of the same species or hybrids prevents over-awarding in most instances.”

From Florida:

“Clearly this is ridiculous. The Royal Horticultural Society tried this 40 years ago and got into all sorts of problems, one of which was that the exhibitors started changing names of their plants.”

“No.”

From Missouri:

“Not applicable to my view, but a logical conclusion to the opposing view.”

“No. If this were the case, once an FCC was awarded, all plants of the same grex would be excluded from awards. Why penalize a perfectly good HCC or AM plant just because an FCC has been awarded?”

“No, because the related number of points must be considered, and also the location of the judging at which its relevant comparisons are made. The experiences of judges, and their ‘maturity’ of judgment, are important. I have a personal opinion on these subjects based on many years of judging experience, and how much water I have seen passing under the bridge that has given rise to our present *Handbook*.”

From Ohio:

“No, of course not. Since points given hit the ‘moving target,’ we can easily give the same or lower number of points and give a valuable award. This is the same thinking that we tend to compare to the last appropriate award.”

“Not necessarily, but mostly. The exception would be the unique features of the plant under consideration. If it isn’t unique in any way, then I would only award it if superior to previous awards.”

“No. The system doesn’t insist on higher awards on successive awards to a grex, but some people on the fringe insist on your statement. Others refuse to give lateral awards of ‘x’ number per grex, per award.”

From Pennsylvania:

“Not a whole lot of choice, but not enough FCCs for good stats.”

Now for my opinions on lateral awarding. When I first joined the AOS judging program, I felt quite strongly that if one plant deserved an award, then certainly a comparable plant of the same grex should also receive an award. If a previous grower had received an award on their plant, it seemed unfair that another grower should be denied an award on a comparable plant. I now feel that this approach should also be tempered with good judgment. We must still award deserving plants so as not to discourage growers from bringing in plants to be judged. However, as our plants evolve and improve, so must our standards for awarding orchids.

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