

To Advance the State of The Art

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A judge, according to Webster, is one who has knowledge sufficient to decide on the merits of a question, -- a connoisseur, -- a critic. But above all an orchid judge is one who is dedicated to the advancement of the state of the art. Why use the word "art" rather than "science"? The evaluation or judgment of any object from an aesthetic standpoint involving form and color implies, to some extent, evaluation by the criteria of art. In floriculture, the discipline of science is the province of the botanist, the taxonomist and the geneticist. Advancing the art in this case involves recognition of superior flowers so that the hybridizer is encouraged to produce ever finer forms.

How does a judge learn to evaluate these elusive points of aesthetics? One of the prerequisites for becoming a competent critic of art is to see many examples of art. One associates with artists and observes their techniques. Finally, when more experienced than most, a critic may come into being. Then he is one who has knowledge sufficient to reach a personal decision about the merits of a new work brought to him for his evaluation; he may in this way be considered to be a connoisseur. Similarly, an orchid judge relies on experience more than on any other single attribute. He must have seen large numbers of orchids. He must have studied orchids. He should associate with growers and hybridizers and observe their techniques and their results.

In order to broaden his experience by observation, a judge must travel both within and outside his region. He must see the finest forms selected for exhibition. When possible, he should visit areas where past experience has shown proficiency in the hybridizing and growing of particular genera. Past experience should be updated in a continuing way by new observation and new experience.

A judge studies orchids, nor necessarily in an attempt to develop an encyclopedic knowledge by rote. An experienced judge is the first to admit that his knowledge of orchids is incomplete, and he is constantly able and willing to learn from others. Study of the species is necessary, as they are the building blocks of modern hybrids. Some knowledge of genetics is required in order to evaluate the results of hybridization. Growing proficiency must be attained in order to know if a plant is well grown or if it is capable of producing markedly better results in cultivation.

Association with others of the orchid growing fraternity comes as a pleasure to most judges. The bond is, of course, the appreciation of this magnificent family of plants. More important than the comradely, however, is the exchange of information, much of it derived

from the personal observations of his peers. The grower relates his successes and failures in providing the proper environment so necessary for optimum flower production. The hybridizer explains the reasons for his expectation of better things to come.

Until not too many years ago judges did actually "just come into being." This was only natural since the orchid growing community was very small. Commercial growers and collectors were in constant correspondence and often visited with each other. The few amateurs were wealthy patrons of the art, and extensive travel was no problem for them. Thus, those capable of acting as judges were easily recognized. Ensuing years have seen such a tremendous growth in both the amateur and commercial ranks that this type of selection process is no longer possible. While communications have improved, the increase in numbers has precluded acquaintance with each and every orchid grower. Difficult as it always is to be selective; qualifications have had to be set forth.

The American Orchid Society's Handbook on Judging now sets forth qualifications for AOS judges, and it further defines the procedures by which judges are appointed. Qualification and training programs for prospective judges have evolved to various extents in all regions to prepare knowledgeable and interested people for ultimate service as AOS judges. In all regions, the basis for these programs is the Student Judge concept whereby candidates are trained under the supervision of accredited AOS judges. At the present time the setting of qualifications and the training of student judges are the responsibilities of the individual regions. It is expected that in the future the Committee on Awards will interest itself in the coordination of these various training programs and that this will result in a more desirably uniform approach to the training of student judges. It is unfortunate that any system must grow in complexity in order to preserve its objectives. But this seems to be inevitable for the art of judging is constantly evolving and improving.