

An Ever-Evolving Awards System

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Published in Awards Quarterly 22, No. 3, 1991, pages 198-199

I have been fortunate to have observed the American Orchid Society's system of judging from its earliest days and also to have participated in its formation. It is more difficult for those entering the judging system today than for those who came along in the early days, particularly the '50s and '60s.

The orchid world is expanding at an accelerated rate. Evidence of this is the increasing number of orchid hybrid registrations. Literally, without equivocation, no one person can know well more than one or two hybrid complexes.

One of the most important events in the history of AOS judging occurred at the First World Orchid Conference October 15-17, 1954 in St. Louis, Missouri, when discussions were held on judging and judging values. Gordon Dillon, the father and originator of World Orchid Conferences and Executive Director of the American Orchid Society for many years, wrote an excellent report of that conference in the December 1954 issue of the AOS Bulletin. The most popular session of that conference was a series of speakers whose theme was what makes a fine orchid. Every major genus was discussed by the various speakers.

The animated discussions we had on establishing the basic values on our judging forms for certain floral parts has lingered in my mind since that time so many years ago. The most vivid recollections I have were the discussions on color versus form. One would have thought that some of the exponents were arguing one or the other, but not both. I argued, "shape is important, but first I see color." The matter has long since been resolved. What is important at this time is that both the older judges and the younger judges retain a sense of perspective and an understanding that our judging system must be continually in the process of evolution.

Helen Adams, unquestionably, was one of the primary architects who laid the foundations for our present system of judging, and I quote from an article written by her in the March 1955 issue of the AOS Bulletin:

"As one of the fortunate participators in the First World Orchid Conference, I am still in an elated frame of mind generated by the number and quality of definite events which took place here....

Notable particularly, from my point of view, were the concerted plans for Regional Judging and the promulgation of a series of standard American Judging Scales.

This is the first big step which proclaims that judging has 'come of age' in America. Up to this time, whether or not unconsciously, we have more or less regarded ourselves as pupils of the Royal Horticultural Society of England. As they were the originators of the system by which we judge, this was the best possible tutelage we could have had..."

AOS's The Handbook of Judging and Exhibition, first published in 1949, was a compilation of what was regarded by experienced persons to be the best methods and practices of showing and judging. At that time, the Society adopted a set of Point Scales which all judges were required to use in making awards, and appointed a number of persons to be official American Orchid Society Judges. These acts in themselves were a distinct change from former procedure.

My theme is that we must continually be reexamining our entire system to see what is good, what should be changed, and most important, what could be added. On this last subject, I will concentrate the remainder of my commentary.

The American Orchid Society has a number of awards which have been established to grant recognition to individuals for outstanding performance in a broad spectrum of areas. For this reason my commentary will be confined entirely to judging and hybridizing.

An award which I hope in time will be granted could be called the Distinguished Breeder's Award. I could compile a long list of persons who have done notable hybridizing and place these names under the title of "unsung heroes." A Distinguished Breeder's Award would be granted to persons who have a record for consistency of outstanding hybridizing. Because orchid hybridizing is unique in some respects from all other plant hybridizing, a dedication to common goals over a long period of time could be one of the critical factors. While the number of awards received by cultivars within the hybrid complex of that breeder is important, recognition would not be based entirely on this fact. Understandably, a subcommittee in the American Orchid Society's judging system would have to be established whose responsibility would be the search for candidates and documentation of the records of these hybridizers. When an individual is proposed for Judge Emeritus, the material compiled for the AOS Committee on Awards is most impressive. This would serve as a good model. Recognition should be given to the living.

Another award for consideration could be called the Distinguished American Hybrid Award. This would be given to a particular grex which had proven to be truly outstanding in many of its cultivars. In some past issues of the AOS Bulletin, certain hybrids have been covered such as *Laeliocattleya Bonanza*. The award should be given to the creator.

A third award I propose could be titled Distinguished Parent Award. This would be for a particular cultivar that has proven to be truly outstanding. Unfortunately, hybridizers often stop using a particular parent long before its breeding profile has been proven. Our very system of judging in American is based upon knowing the exact parentage of a cultivar being judged and how the parent or parents have influenced the progeny. Regrettably, this practice is overlooked frequently in judging. Several of my nominations for the famous parent award would be to such plants as Paphiopedilum callosum 'Sparkling Burgundy', Cymbidium Balkis, 'Silver Orb', Cymbidium Early Bird 'Pacific', AM/RHS, Phalaenopsis Elizabethiae 4N, Paphiopedilum Winston Churchill and its two cultivars, and more. This list could be long. The value of this award is that very often in orchid breeding one single cultivar can be the start of an entire outstanding line of breeding.

Another award which I hope we will have in time would be called the All-American Award to a cultivar. All-American awards are popular in general floriculture and horticulture, so there are many guidelines. The problem is establishing the organization of an All-American Award and administering it. The argument for the award is that in the orchid world we are subjected to such a deluge of hybrids in every genus, that it is difficult to establish any order out of what is being presented for public offering. Many of the very beautiful hybrids pass before our eyes so quickly we cannot remember having seen them. In your mind, return to the last show you attended. What did you see or what do you remember? In the orchid world, we need plants which are memorable and which are in common distribution. We need plants which are not only beautiful but which grow and flower well under a variety of conditions. We need plants that people will purchase, knowing they will do well in the new environment. I sincerely hope that this seed will fall on fertile ground.

Orchid judging is a fascinating subject. As an orchid breeder I have tried to relate the work of the breeder to our judging system. As a judge I have tried also to relate judging to what new areas of recognition can be established in our present system. The American system of judging is by far the largest in the world. It is gratifying to see other countries accepting the concept and procedures for their own systems. More than anything else, I hope that throughout the world we will have one concept of judging to include World Orchid Conferences.