

To Measure or Not to Measure, That is the Question?

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Measurement for awards first brings to mind completing the floral measurement section on the award form. Because this section is so explicitly laid out, unless segments are too small or too inaccessible to be measured, there is uniform treatment by those writing award descriptions.

The problem on measurement often arises as in the case of CBRs, CHMs, CCMs or CCEs. For these, lack of consistency where such measurements are necessary and meaningful is evident when you review issues of *Awards Quarterly*. According to Pam Giust, each judging centre has developed its own, frequently unwritten ‘rules’ as to what should be included, given that the Handbook on Judging is vague. Indeed, the Handbook puts the onus on the chair of judging: “The recorded *measurements* and description should be reviewed by the chair of judging or the alternate *before* the summary sheets are forwarded to make sure the *information is complete and informative*”. The “AQ Style Guide” admittedly does imply certain measurements by way of examples. In neither publication, other than for floral measurements, is there a specific list of what measurements should be included in award descriptions.

In the case of CBRs and CHMs, standard practice is to describe the plant as fully as possible. Generally this includes overall measurement of the plant and of the vegetative parts, although this is not universally provided!!!! Section 7.5 “Measurement and Description” in the Handbook reads as follows: “A uniform standard for measuring and describing awarded plants and flowers is essential in *providing useful records with which to compare subsequent cultivars of the same species or breeding.*” (author’s italics). Yet listing no specific instructions opens the door to inconsistency and a disappointing lack of information for considering future awards.

A corollary of this suggests yet another problem. Even if we universally had the old *Registry of Awards* descriptions available and all converted to metric for easier comparison at the judging table, many of these are still cryptic at best and lack rudimentary vegetative measurements. The general rule is that the first instance of description of a species should be detailed and include measurements [Section 7.5 (5) reads “Special attention should be given to the descriptions and *measurements* of orchid species. . . This is particularly true in the case of Certificate of Botanical Recognition. . .”]. So the question becomes when a species is presented and appears to be eligible for a quality award and the only previous award is an old CBM (e.g., *Tetramicra elegans* ‘Water Isle’ CBM/AOS described in *Registry of Awards*, vol. 6, p 1182 and ‘Jackie’ HCC/AOS described in *Awards Quarterly*, Vol 38, No.1, p.66, 2007) or a woefully skimpy CBR or CHM description, should the opportunity be taken to fully describe the plant and flower to “provide useful records with which to compare subsequent cultivars?” If we follow this rule, then the answer is an unequivocal ‘Yes!’

Another example that is viewed by many as discretionary is in the addition of inflorescence length for quality awards. No where in the Handbook is this latter measurement suggested although roughly half of such awards have included it in their description. Yet who could argue that it generally has an impact on presentation, is useful

in assuring accurate identification of species (e.g., *Phrag besseae* versus *Phrag delessandroi* with the addition of vegetative height---where there was some controversy in the past as to whether or not what was awarded were *besseae* or *dellesandroi*) or in noting that a parent of a particular hybrid was or was not successful in improving presentation (e.g., Were the flowers held sufficiently above the foliage as might be desired in some *Masdevallia* or *Bulbophyllum* breeding where new species are being added to the mix?)? Of course, I am not referring to instances where flower parts are too minute to measure, impossible to ‘get to without destroying the flower’ as in some Anguloas, or a single-flowered plant like a Pleurothallid where the flower is held tightly against the leaf making inflorescence length irrelevant.

The Handbook should to be revised to provide a specific list of measurements beyond floral parts for each category of award. To begin with, inflorescence length should *always* be included: not just for assessing future awards but also for pointing out by way of example improvements or faults in a species cultivar or a hybrid to help hybridizers and judges alike assess and *compare* quality. There should be no secrets by omission!!!! Such things as pot/mount size, pseudobulb/leaf width/length, total vegetative length, pedicel/peduncle length, etc., should also be considered for this mandatory list, especially for CBRs and CHMs. Consider the range of what we now see as evidenced by the two following examples from the March, 2007 *Awards Quarterly*:

Pleurothallis (syn *Apoda-proreneptia*) *calypso* ‘Bryon’, CBR/AOS. . . “Seven flowers and two buds on nine inflorescences; flowers and buds hidden inside dry, brown spathe in leaf axil, spathe 1.0 cm wide by 3.2 cm long; plant grown on a 9-cm tree fern square, four long repent growths, longest 48 cm long, leaves pendent, cupped, 1.7 cm wide by 8 cm long. . .”

And cryptically from the same issue:

Dendrobium species “Clonal Name”, CBR/AOS . . . “Thirty-six flowers and 13 buds on five inflorescences; . . .” (no measurements other than floral natural spread and floral parts provided).

The proof is in the pudding or, in this case, the lack of measurements!!!! *Size matters!*