

The Name Game

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Published in Awards Quarterly, Vol. 26, No. 2, Summer 1995, Page 113

It's a truism that everyone wants his or her name spelled correctly. In the orchid world, however, correct names are not a mere matter of ego. They are a matter of preeminent importance in what is probably the most thoroughly and correctly documented area of horticulture.

When a grower purchases an orchid seedling from a reputable orchid nursery, the seller provides a tag that identifies the seedling's parents and the grex name, if it already has been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society. The information on this tag should remain with the seedling indefinitely. If the grower should be skillful and lucky enough to bring up his little seedling to adult splendor and then take it to regional judging or to a show where it receives an American Orchid Society award, he has the right to give it any clonal name he wishes, within the parameters of the judging system. That clonal name and the award designation stay with the plant and all of its vegetative divisions. If the grower should decide to meristem his plant, those plants also are labeled with the grex name, the clonal name and the award of the parent plant, since they are genetically identical to it.

Many times an orchid grower will be attracted to a meristem or mericlone of a superior plant and will buy it for his own greenhouse. When large nurseries produce and market such meristems, they attach a clonal name to the meristem. This clonal name should remain with the plant for the rest of its life, even though it has not been awarded. Why? Quite often, the desirable plant that has been meristemmed and marketed has the potential of receiving an AOS award at some future date when a grower submits it for judging at the top of its form. The temptation here, for the proud grower, is to rename the meristem with his own private designation. The AOS judging system does not permit this, and there is a very good reason.

Generally, meristems of any one plant are produced in generous, often prodigal, numbers. Suppose a grower attaches a different clonal name to his meristemmed plant, which is genetically identical to all of its siblings. He receives an AOS award on this plant which goes into the awards records under that clonal name. Chances are, some of the other owners of the thousand or so meristems of this same plant are pretty good growers too, and their plants may receive awards elsewhere. If each identical meristem of the same plant is named differently, chaos results – chaos for the owners and growers, for the hybridizers who want to use specific plants with specific groups of characteristics in their crosses, and for the American Orchid Society, which needs to keep its awards records organized and accurate.

The Handbook on Orchid Nomenclature and Registration – Fourth Edition, gives some guidance on this question. For our purposes here, the term “cultivar” used in the handbook includes our term “clonal.” Rule 24, on page 19 of the handbook, states “In

order to be legitimate, grex and cultivar names of orchids must have been validly published...”

Further down on page 19, Rule 26 states that “in order to be valid, the publication of a cultivar name is effected by the distribution or availability to the public of printed or duplicated matter.” In other words, if the seller of the meristems has listed the clonal name in his sales list or ads, and attached the clonal name to the tags on his meristems, that is “valid publication,” and the clonal name should be honored.

Sometimes large commercial nurseries will market a meristem of a superior plant when the grex name has yet to be registered. One such cross which is currently available is (*Howeara* Mini-Primi x *Rodriguezia secunda*). The seller has given this meristem the clonal name ‘Puanani’. In this case, too, we should honor the clone name that has been assigned to the plant, since there undoubtedly are hundreds of the same meristemmed plant currently circulating in the orchid markets.

As a logical extension of this principle of keeping records of breeding and inheritance clear, it is also helpful if private orchid growers give clonal names or designations to plants which they are dividing. That way, if one of the divisions is subsequently awarded, others who own divisions of the same plant can add the award to their plant tags.

You might ask why a private grower would sell or give away a division of a plant that is awardable before it has been awarded. It happens! Greenhouse space is all too limited, and some plants need to be mature before they reach their full potential. *Broughtonia* hybrids, for instance, improve markedly when they are mature, sometimes to awardable quality. There are many examples of the same kind of improvement upon maturity in other genera.

Suppose a grower presents for judging consideration a division of a seedling that he has acquired from another noncommercial grower, and the plant is granted an AOS award. It would seem to be courteous and “fair play” on the part of the owner of that plant to offer the original grower a chance to give the awarded plants its clonal name, since the original grower nursed the little seedling to its present maturity.

In all of the situations described here, the unifying principle is to maintain the integrity and continuity of information concerning the orchids we have discussed. It is important to the growers, and sometimes the hybridizers of these plants, along with the American Orchid Society and its judging system, and for the Royal Horticultural Society, our traditional records preserver. Clear and accurate record-keeping aids us today and helps the growers and hybridizers of tomorrow.