

The Training Role of the American Orchid Society Judge

By R.F. Nagle

Published in Award Quarterly Vol. 3, No. 4, 1972, page 98

There are approximately 250 certified American Orchid Society Judges. This is an approximate number because it is constantly changing as new judges are appointed and others retire or become deceased. If we assume an average service of twenty years for a judge we must replace five percent of our judges each year. Further, to allow for the staffing of an increasing number of shows and an increasing AOS membership, the total number of judges must increase each year. Actually, the number of judges has increased by about seven percent per year for the last ten years (i.e., doubled in the last ten years). While it would be interesting to compile exact statistics on judging service, the foregoing assumption is reasonable enough to imply that we must train and certify between five and ten prevent new judges each year. Considering the service time requirements of Student and Probationary Judges, almost half of the personnel involved in the judging function are in some phase of training. It should, therefore, be obvious that in order to maintain and improve the standards of orchid judging a viable training program must be the concern of every accredited judge.

At this point in the evolution of the judging function of the American Orchid Society prospective Student Judges are selected and trained within each individual geographic region. There is a pressing need to establish uniform standards of acceptance and training and toward this end the Committee on Awards of the American Orchid Society will be devoting much effort in the near future. Coordination of the various student training programs is not a simple matter for each regional program as it now exists comprises many excellent concepts even though each of these programs is structured to suit the unique geographical problems of the region involved. The establishment of uniform training standards will then necessarily require some time to implement. In the interim an individual effort is required to assure the training of competent judges.

It is the obligation of each accredited judge to assist in training those under him. In addition to participating in formal regional training programs each judge must lend the benefit of his experience to Student and Probationary Judges whenever possible. The approach to the two classes of judges under him, however, should be distinctly different.

Student Judges come into the program with little knowledge of the mechanics of judging. Their background is usually that of proficient grower and student of orchids with a keen interest in their evaluation. Most regions now have formal training programs to instruct

the student in the mechanics of judging which must be supplemented by field experience. Providing meaningful field experience is the responsibility of the Accredited Judge and a few minutes' time invested toward this end will contribute greatly toward the training program. Remember, you were once a student yourself. Take time to explain to your students the reasons for the various rules and regulations you follow during both award judging and show judging. When evaluating flowers, discuss their merits and faults with your students. Try to develop a positive attitude by asking them to discuss the good features of a flower as well as the bad. Assign your students to work with genera with which they are not familiar. Do not let them pick their own assignments as it is a natural tendency to want to work with familiar genera. Evaluating familiar genera may impress others with their knowledge but it adds little to their experience in preparation for judgeship. Be patient and teach by example.

Probationary Judges are a different matter. They have served their student apprenticeship. They are certified judges and are acting on behalf of the American Orchid Society just as you are. They are to be guided, not directed. They are, however, still in the process of acquiring the experience required for full accreditation. Like the Student Judge, the Probationary Judge should attempt to broaden his knowledge of the various genera. He should be assigned, whenever possible, to work with acknowledged experts on genera with which he is the least familiar. This can present a problem since individuals are not recognized for what they do not know and reliance must be placed on the person's desire to learn rather than to impress. The desire to learn must be recognized and then encouraged. Every judge must realize that the learning process never ceases.

Perhaps it appears naïve to believe that the Accredited Judge must be reminded of his obligation to assist in training those under him. Reflection on this point, however, is sure to bring to mind instances in which the attitude of the Accredited Judge left much to be desired. Undue criticism perhaps, or lack of patience or understanding just might have been evidence that, at least for the moment, the Accredited Judge forgot his role in the training of the AOS judge of the future.