

Botanical and Horticultural Awards

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When the American Orchid Society awards system was created, it was designed well and served the orchid growing community in the United States very well. But growth of immense proportions has taken place, including AOS judging outside the United States. As new orchid trends and interests arise, the Committee on Awards (COA) refines and changes rules as necessary - which is one of the strengths of our awards system. The number of awards choices for any outstanding plant always has been greater than in any other orchid awards system in the world. Our focus here is on those choices that occasionally are misused or misapplied, that is, choices that pertain to the previously unawarded species of any size, color, or origin. Any unawarded orchid species can receive a Certificate of Botanical Recognition (CBR), Certificate of Horticultural Merit (CHM), or any of the quality awards. This multiplicity of awards choices is unnecessary and leads to confusion and widely varying interpretations.

Uniform application of the two currently available botanical and horticultural awards is virtually impossible to achieve due to the large size of the judging community, the large geographical area covered, and the sometimes rigid attitudes of the judging personnel, which precludes the consistency we all hope to achieve. (In some regions, these awards are rarely, if ever, utilized.)

Because we have a flexible system of awards, we feel the time has come for serious review of the botanical and horticultural awards. The available options are: 1) to continue with the status quo; 2) to focus on the clarification of the current awards in training sessions and seminars; or 3) to return to the Certificate of Botanical Merit (CBM) - with certain modifications.

The previously available CBM was meaningful and coveted, and well served the need to recognize previously unawarded, well-grown, outstanding species. With proper modification of point scoring and award definition, the CBM could greatly improve and simplify out present awards choices.

A judges' workshop is planned at the October Trustees' Meeting near Orlando, Florida, to address this problem. After this workshop, we feel every judge should be polled through his or her regional judging center to register his or her opinion on this matter. If it is determined that the present two awards (CBR, CHM) are the most desirable method of

recognition for orchid species, we should make every effort to apply them uniformly, with clarified instructions directed to every judge from the COA.

In the fifth edition of the Handbook on Judging and Exhibition, the Certificate of Botanical Merit is defined as follows: "Awarded only to well-grown plants of uncommon species which, by virtue of possessing one or more outstanding characteristics or one or more characteristics in outstanding degree, represent a worthy new concept of horticultural desirability ..." The point scale on which 80 or more points must be scored for the award to be granted is shown in the accompanying chart.

POINT SCORING -- CBM

Flower characteristics

Form.....	12
Color.....	12
Size.....	12

Plant characteristics

Robustness (size, natural vigor).....	10
Condition (culture).....	10
Floriferousness.....	10

Other characteristics

Aesthetic appeal (charm).....	12
Educational value.....	12
Rarity in cultivation.....	10

Total Points 100

POINT SCORING -- CHM

Flower characteristics.....36

Form (12)

Color (12)	
Size (12)	
Plant characteristics.....	36
Robustness (12)	
Condition (12)	
Floriferousness (12)	
Other characteristics.....	28
Aesthetic appeal (28)	
Total Points	100

The eighth edition of the Handbook gives the current definition of the Certificate of Botanical Recognition: "Awarded to a cultivar of a species or natural hybrid deemed worthy of recognition for rarity, novelty, and educational value. The entire plant must be exhibited and not just the inflorescence. The plant need have no special horticultural desirability. No award of any kind may have previously been made to the species as a taxon. No point scale is used but the award shall be granted only by the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds (2/3) of the judging teams assigned...This award is granted provisionally and filed with the regional chairman pending the exhibitor supplying full taxonomic verification by a taxonomist acceptable to AOS..."

The eighth edition describes the Certificate of Horticultural Merit in this manner: "Awarded to a cultivar of a well-grown and well-flowered species or natural hybrid with outstanding esthetic appeal that contributes to the horticultural aspects of orchidology. The entire plant must be exhibited and not just the inflorescence. This certificate may be awarded more than once if a plant has characteristics significantly different and desirable from other similarly awarded cultivars. The distinctive features of the new cultivar must be clearly described. The award should not be granted to a cultivar which has previously received a Certificate of Botanical Merit...A score of at least 80 points on the point scale in Section 6.3.2 is required. This award is granted provisionally and filed with the regional chairman pending the exhibitor supplying full taxonomic verification by a taxonomist acceptable to AOS..." The point scale is shown in the accompanying chart.

The CBM, replaced today by the CBR and CHM, was more clearly understood and more reasonably applied than the present pair of awards. Many insignificant orchid species today are "put on record" by being given a CBR simply on the basis of existing and being in bloom at the time of judging. The premise of making an award to put the plant "on the

record" is totally invalid. In order for an orchid species to receive any sort of AOS award, it must be taxonomically verified. Thus, it must have been validly published in a juried publication, complete with Latin description, citations, etc. In other words, it is already effectively "on the record." Because the Awards Quarterly is not a juried botanical publication and its purpose is not to make a recorded list of all orchid species, this argument is without justification.

Among the terms that vary widely in interpretation are "educational value," "rarity in cultivation," "aesthetic values," and "novelty," all of which are subject to the individual preferences of the judges.

The CHM often is misapplied because it implies that the plant has horticultural value for possible propagation and distribution to many growers. For example, a *Grammatophyllum speciosum* was given a CHM in 1978 despite being described in *Philippine Orchids* as not having much horticultural distribution value due to its large size and heavy shipping weight. Extremely small plants or species that are rare due to their specific cultural requirements also would be without horticultural value.

Because all these awards are to be given only to previously unawarded plants, it seems to be a deliberate evasion of intent to make a botanical or horticultural award and then give the same plant at the same judging session a quality or cultural award. What purpose is served by this redundant awarding?

The trial period of the two replacement awards has been approximately 10 years, long enough to draw valid conclusions. The CBM could simply and clearly be applied to all species of outstanding value for rarity, beauty, cultural perfection, bloom quality, etc. it served the awards system without controversy and misapplication for many years. In the interest of clarity and uniformity in judging, the original Certificate of Botanical Merit, with reference to educational value deleted, would serve the orchid community more effectively than the present Certificate of Botanical Recognition and Certificate of Horticultural Merit, which not only are confusing but are redundant and, thus, unnecessary. There are many more species waiting to be evaluated by our dedicated judges, and the Certificate of Botanical Merit could do justice to all of them with more clarity and more uniform results.