

Where Did All the Awards Go?

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The American Orchid Society began granting awards to superior orchid plants and flowers in the 1930s, as can be determined from the early editions of the *Register of Awards*, the predecessor of the *Awards Quarterly*. However, the volume was negligible until about 25 years ago when the first Regional Judging centers were developed and when AOS judging at orchid shows was first sanctioned. Since that time, judging centers and AOS judging at shows have proliferated such that the number of awards has increased almost exponentially. This was no doubt due to the growing popularity of small greenhouses, the improved methods of growing orchids from seed, the increased interest in hybridization, the greater variety and quality of plants submitted for judging, and the greater accessibility of judging.

It is instructive therefore to review what has happened during the past quarter of a century in the granting of awards. Sometimes the process has moved gradually, sometimes explosively. About four years ago, for example, the first clones of a beautiful, new hybrid cross began to appear on judging tables. *Maclellanara* Pagan Lovesong. By the end of 1981, 38 AOS awards had been published for this hybrid from all corners of the country, with scores ranging from 76 to 90 points. And of course, this is not the final total. If all these awarded plants could have appeared on a single table before the same team of judges, would the results have been the same? Probably not. Variability of results in judging is one of the prices we pay for the fractionalization of our judging system, and this, of course, is complicated by the imprecise descriptions we give to awarded flowers.

But was *Maclellanara* Pagan Lovesong the first orchid to take this country by storm? Apparently not. A search of the records indicates that other fine hybrids – as well as some species – have enjoyed periods of intense popularity at the judging tables. The popularity of none of these has been undeserved, although one does wonder whether we have always maintained our sense of proportion in the face of what might be called the fads of the day.

During the history of the awards system, the American Orchid Society had published about 18,300 awards by the end of 1981 – a number about two-thirds as large as all the known orchid species of the world. Since many of these species have little horticultural value, the comparison is not of great validity, but it does suggest that we have kept our interests largely confined to spectacular genera primarily of commercial appeal. New definitions of the Certificates of Botanical Recognition and the Certificate of Horticultural Merit, together with the growing interest of many hobbyists in orchid species, should help to correct this imbalance.

It is of interest to note that of all AOS awards ever made, 16% have gone to the genus *Paphiopedilum*. It is of more than interest – it is a matter for concern – that, of all the awards published in 1980 and 1981, exactly one-third went to paphiopedilums. As attractive as paphiopedilums are, what developments have taken place in the genus in the

last few years to justify the excessive attention paid to them, to the obvious exclusion of the tremendous variety existing elsewhere in the orchid world? Have paphiopedilums become so commonplace and so relatively easy to judge that we pass up, in their favor, more complicated judging problems presented by less familiar genera? Or, although standards for judging cut orchid flowers are identical with those for flowers still attached to the plant, does the fact that paphiopedilums are unusually attractive plants in their own right (as many orchids are not) give them an unintentional advantage?

For purposes of comparison, I have listed the 20 natural and hybrid genera which have received the most AOS awards, as well as the most awarded hybrids or species within those genera. For this purpose I have retained the familiar horticultural names: *Epidendrum* includes *Encyclia*, *Masdevallia* includes *Dracula*, and *Paphiopedilum* includes those Asiatic species formerly known as *Cypripedium*.

There are some surprises on the list. Before looking at the list, you might want to give yourself a “quiz” by writing down your immediate impressions as to what you feel have been the most awarded genera, specific hybrid crosses and species, along with approximate number of awards for each. Remember, we are not tallying only awards given during the past few years but over a span of 25 years – longer than most of us have been growing orchids.

GENUS	AWARDS	HYBRID CROSS OR SPECIES	AWARDS
<i>Paphiopedilum</i>	2936	Vanda M. Pearman	47
		<i>bellatulum</i>	47
		<i>sukhakulii</i>	45
		<i>fairieanum</i>	40
<i>Cymbidium</i>	1584	Lillian Stewart	84
<i>Phalaenopsis</i>	1207	<i>violacea</i>	45
<i>Cattleya</i>	1167	Bob Betts	66
<i>Laeliocattleya</i>	1139	Bonanza	51
<i>Dendrobium</i>	766	Hickam Deb	25
<i>Brassolaeliocattleya</i>	732	Mem. Crispin Rosales	48
<i>Vanda</i>	722	<i>sanderiana</i>	101
<i>Oncidium</i>	686	<i>papilio</i>	25
<i>Ascocenda</i>	672	Yip Sum Wah	94
<i>Epidendrum</i>	289	<i>stamfordianum</i>	18
<i>Sophrolaeliocattleya</i>	265	Jewel Box	27
<i>Odontoglossum</i>	258	<i>grande</i>	16
<i>Miltonia</i>	236	<i>spectabilis</i>	19
<i>Doritaenopsis</i>	215	Red Coral	22
<i>Masdevallia</i>	208	<i>coccinea</i>	12
<i>Brassocattleya</i>	190	Mount Anderson	28
<i>Odontioda</i>	183	Lippesterm	8
		Minel	8
<i>Lycaste</i>	157	<i>skinneri</i>	24

Odontocidium

154

Tiger Butter

41

For those who recognized *Vanda sanderiana* as the most awarded orchid in all AOS history, there will be no special recognition. You have already received it!