

The Certificate of Cultural Merit

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The purpose of the Certificate of Cultural Merit (CCM) Award is to recognize outstanding culture as a worthy achievement. Exceptional culture is further recognized by the American Orchid Society (AOS) through the Butterworth Prize, which provides a monetary award given annually by the Board of Trustees to the grower of an orchid plant, either species or hybrid, that is regarded by the Committee on Awards as the most outstanding example of orchid culture to have been awarded a Certificate of Cultural Merit (CCM) during the preceding year. This prize was provided in 1966 through a gift to the American Orchid Society from Mrs. Rachel Butterworth Dietz in memory of her parents John and Nancy Butterworth.

While the Handbook of Judging and Exhibition, referred to as the Handbook establishes the basic regulations under which the AOS Judging System operates, we must rely on the interpretations of individual judges as they weight the many subjective values encountered in the judging process. Having said this, we need to look to the Handbook for direction.

For a better understanding of the several criteria for giving the Certificate of Cultural Merit (CCM) Award, one needs to review Section 7.3.11 of the Handbook, which in essence states: The Certificate of Cultural Merit is awarded to the exhibitor of:

- 1) a specimen plant of robust health and appearance,
- 2) a plant with an unusually large number of flowers,
- 3) a plant which has been in the care of the exhibitor at least six months immediately prior to the award date, and
- 4) a plant which scores at least 80 points on the Point Scale in Section 6.3.1.

As we examine these criteria we must first consider the definition of a Specimen Plant. Paragraph (71) of Chapter VIII of the Handbook defines Specimen (plant) as: "A single plant of unusual size and number of flowers for the variety, exhibiting fine culture." It is important as Judges that we note the qualification, for the variety, in this definition since the number of flowers produced by plants may vary radically depending on their genera, and variety.* Note also, a Specimen Plant is a single plant. Paragraph (48) of Chapter VIII of the Handbook defines a "Made-up-Plant" as, "A number of identical plants growing or

placed together in the same pot," and directs that such an arrangement is not to be judged as a specimen plant.

When we consider the criterion, -- A plant of robust health and appearance, a plant with foliage housing a colony of aphids or mites, or one marred with fungal or bacterial scars can hardly be considered as being of robust and healthy appearance. Plants with damaged foliage or flowers, caused by insects, snails, mites, disease, or the family cat, should not be nominated for the CCM Award; if nominated they should not be scored; if scored they probably should not be awarded if the Point Scale in Section 6.3.1, which concerns the Size and condition of plant, is properly observed.

One criterion for giving the CCM Award is that the plant have an unusually large number of flowers; this is a desirable characteristic which accounts for thirty points under Floriferousness on the Point Scale. The requirement for an unusually large number of flowers must be considered carefully in relation to the flowering habit of the particular genus or "variety" being judged. One might see fifty to a hundred flowers in excellent condition on a lycaste, cattleya or cymbidium. However, one will rarely see ten flowers on an *Acacallis cyanea* on the judging table. How often does one see a *stanhopea* with fifty flowers - in bloom - at one time? The point is, we must understand what may be considered an unusually large number of flowers for one genus may be somewhat ordinary for a free-flowering sympodial epiphyte of another genus.

The long standing admonition - "Plants to be judged according to type and breeding," is certainly applicable when considering a specimen plant for a Certificate of Cultural Merit.

Since the CCM Award is given to a particular grower in recognition of above-average cultural achievement, before sending the summary sheet forward to the Awards Registrar, the Chairman of Judging should confirm, either directly or indirectly, that the exhibitor has possessed and grown the plant for at least six months immediately preceding the judging date. A simple statement of understanding from the plant owner should suffice. The exhibitor may be either an individual or a nursery firm.

All AOS awards granted individual plants are made to a particular cultivar which must be designated by a permanent cultivar epithet. AOS awards for flower quality tend to enhance the value of awarded clones. However, the Certificate of Cultural Merit is not awarded to an orchid cultivar but rather to the exhibitor of the plant and becomes a part of the plant's record. Divisions of the CCM-awarded plant bear the cultivar name but not the CCM/AOS designation. Some persons seeking potentially "good growers" tend to opt for divisions of CCM-awarded clones.

The last consideration in the Point Scale for the CCM Award is Quality of bloom. This criterion should not be confused with Form of flower, and Color of flower, which are major

considerations in the Point Scales for the Flower Quality awards listed in Section 6.2 of the Handbook, i.e., FCC and AM awards. Rather, the Quality of bloom in the CCM Point Scale pertains primarily to the condition of the flowers on the specimen plant, and how it displays its flowers at the time of judging. A further consideration of Quality of bloom is the number of flowers in bloom at the time of exhibition. Here again the judge must consider the flowering habit of the particular species or hybrid being judged.

In the AOS Judging System, good, succinct descriptions are essential in providing useful comparisons with subsequent awards of the same species or breeding. Recording the number of flowers and buds on the inflorescence is particularly important for CCM Awards. Long after the flowers have faded away each region forwards its nomination for the best cultural specimen awarded a CCM during the preceding year. A Committee on Awards judging team, based on the written and photographic descriptions provided by the regions, recommends the most outstanding Cultural Specimen to receive the Butterworth Prize. Each region has the duty to provide good and timely photography of awarded plants; a duty too frequently not met. Paragraph (5) of Section 5.5.3 of the Handbook is not fully observed in recording the results of our judgments. This section directs that twenty-one properly labeled 35-mm colored slides and one black-and-white pictures published in the Awards Quarterly, are essential to the proper functioning of the AOS Judging System. The pictures and descriptions provide the basis for greater uniformity of judging throughout the vast territory served by AOS Judges. As Regional Chairmen, we have a duty to establish a control system to assure that the plants awarded within our judging jurisdictions are photographed properly, and that the slides and black-and-white photographs are labeled and forwarded to AOS with minimal delay. May I suggest we each review the issues of the Awards Quarterly for 1983 to determine if we are in fact meeting the requirements for black-and-white pictures in our respective regions.

As we work with the Handbook we may find sections with which we do not agree, or to which we may wish to suggest additions, deletions, or modifications. With regard to the Certificate of Cultural Merit I suggest these two minor additions be considered when the 7th Edition is revised:

Amend Section 6.4.3 DESCRIPTION, by adding a subparagraph (5) to read: "For CCM and CBR Awards the vegetative growths of the plant should be considered."

Amend Section 7.3.11 CERTIFICATE of CULTURAL MERIT, to end the first sentence with the words: "for the variety." This would be as is now provided in the definition of SPECIMEN in paragraph (71) page 59, of the 7th Edition.

Hopefully these observations may be helpful to student and probationary judges as they contemplate nominating and judging cultural specimens.