

Judging Paphiopedilums

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While a good general outline of the criteria for judging paphiopedilums may be found in paragraph 6.1.6 of the seventh edition of the AOS Handbook on Judging and Exhibition (1982), a little amplification - and not so much emphasis on roundness and the dorsal sepal - should be made. To be as concise as possible: a paph should have a pleasing shape in which all the parts fit. There should be as little fenestration as possible. The flower should be graceful and well held. The stem, of course, will have a great bearing on how the flower is held. It should be strong and graceful, holding the flower well above the foliage. Proper staking is not unacceptable. The stake should hold the flower in such a position that it can be viewed face on without distortion.

To summarize: there is a round shape in which all the parts more or less touch the circumference of a circle. An oval shape, the larger diameter in the horizontal, is also quite pleasing and is now acceptable in this country. Indeed, the last twenty years, I would say this oval shape has predominated. I much prefer it to a round shape when the round shape is the result of much cupping and forward protrusion of the petals such as is present in Paphiopedilum Paeony 'Regency' and similar hybrids. An oval shape, with the longer diameter in the vertical, is also seen and is not usually as pleasing. There are, of course, variations to these shapes. The points scored will depend upon the reaction of the judge and his experience in evaluating these shapes.

Many judges seem to have a "hand-up" as far as the ventral sepal is concerned. They tend to put far too much emphasis on this part. It is agreed that the ventral sepal can be too insignificant, thereby spoiling the general outline. More uncommonly it may be too large. In addition the ventral sepal may be split, due perhaps to atavism. Generally the inexperienced judge tends to overemphasize this part. I suggest tolerance. Observe the whole effect and do not be arbitrary!

As to color, this again should be pleasing. It should be brilliant or vivid, depending on the hue, and all the colors concerned should be clear and pleasing in relation to one another. Color preferences cannot be dictated. Some people like red, some green, some yellow, but do not let your likes color your judging! As you gain experience with paphiopedilums, you will learn that certain color combinations are less frequently seen than others; in certain instances, toleration of some less desirable qualities in other characteristics such as shape should be made in view of the rarity or infrequency of a color or color combination. As a

corollary, perhaps, in the more common colors, higher degrees of excellence should be demanded in shape, stem, carriage, etc.

Substance and texture of paphs are not usually a problem, but they should always be kept in mind. Unlike cattleyas and orchids of other genera, most paphs have excellent substance; yet a judge should always test substance to assess its quality. As far as texture is concerned, again it is not usually a problem. The judge should be alert, however, to a dull texture with a lack of brilliance and sheen, revealing poor quality or an old flower.

Size is another characteristic of paphs that sometimes causes difficulty in judging. Referring to 6.1.6 in the Handbook again, I do not agree with the last sentence: "Size is based on width of the dorsal sepal and the proportion of the rest of the flower to this measurement, according to breeding." I think that size is based on the overall dimensions of the flower and the dorsal should fit in, not the reverse. Size, of course, depends on breeding, and breeding will be touched upon briefly in the next paragraph. In assessing size, a paph does not have to be monstrous to be of award quality. There are many fine small and medium-sized paphs. If a paph is small, I feel that the shape should be exceedingly good. The larger the flower, the more tolerant we may possibly be with shape. But a truly large paph will not look nearly so large, and therefore will be more desirable, the better its shape. I should not have to mention it, but grotesqueness should not be nominated. As for deformities? Never!

I have mentioned shape, color, size and other characteristics of paphs in the paragraphs above, but there is breeding to be considered as well. Breeding can cover a multitude of factors, but I think it is worthwhile here to point out the fact that many orchid growers throughout the country have become more and more interested in *Paphiopedilum* species, primary hybrids, and crosses made many years ago or, indeed, crosses never made before, using a species as one of the parents. Many interesting and different shapes will be developed by such breeding, and many color combinations not seen in the so-called modern hybrids will once again be coming to the exhibition table. The background of all these new hybrids will have to be kept in mind as the judges consider the flowers. Refer to the hybrid lists freely. Just because the parts do not touch the circumference of a circle does not mean that these flowers should be passed over. Yet judges should not relax their standards. If anything, the standards should be raised, but, again, that factor, breeding, must be recognized and taken into account.

Sometimes a problem with descriptions and/or measurements of previously awarded flowers of the same cross comes before the judges. Preliminary to nominating and/or scoring, if a judge calls for the descriptions of previous awarded clones of the same cross, he will have to be satisfied with what is in the record. There is nothing else, unless there is a judge present with personal knowledge of the previous award. Recall of details will not be as precise as a good record. An overall recollection is somewhat better. After all, what is

experience but the recall of previous events. It is extremely important for future reference that adequate and precise descriptions be recorded on the judging summary sheets. Pictures are records, too. If pictures are available, view them, but be wary. Many are as bad or worse than some descriptions. Some are excellent, but, good as they may be, they cannot provide a third dimension.

A more difficult subject to handle is measurement. When I make a record of my own flowers, I record the horizontal dimension, then the vertical dimension. There are many additional figures required by the judging summary sheets. Of these one of the most significant in a paphiopedilum is the petal width. In a large modern hybrid, I like to see a width of at least two inches. Of course, the wider the petals the better, in most cases. The width of the dorsal sepal is important but other measurements are of less moment. While it is important to check the records to see if there are any plants of the same cross previously awarded, one has to view the measurements with great care. Many judges hang on measurements too rigidly. With species particularly, I prefer to see a larger flower and am very conservative in awarding another clone of a species that does not show some characteristic, notably size or color, that is better than that of the previous clones awarded. This does not mean to say that if one clone has received an FCC, I would not consider giving an AM to a somewhat lesser specimen, but I like to be most demanding with species. Similarly, this attitude should carry over to primary hybrids. All judges should be exceedingly familiar with the various species. In a primary hybrid, the resultant flower should measure better than at least one parent. Size requirements can be reasonably modified if outstandingly interesting colors are present. With the more complex hybrids, however, size, particularly the overall width, is not always the hallmark of a good orchid. Again the overall effect is important. Just because one plant of a hybrid cross, when awarded, measured 5 inches, while another plant of the same cross is submitted and is a mere 4½ inches across, does not mean the smaller should be shunned. It must be viewed with a careful eye and not disregarded just because it is smaller by one-half-inch. Of course there must be good and sufficient reasons to award it, but a one-half-inch difference in width is not necessarily a good and sufficient reason. In other words, read the descriptions, examine the measurements, look at the picture, listen to other judges, be careful, be considerate, search your own experience, reflect - then judge.

One other difficulty sometimes encountered is damage in transit. It should not cause a problem if judges are tolerant and reasonable. When flowers are shipped in, please view them with some perspective if they are obviously bruised or if a lip or petal has been cracked or even severed in transit. The exhibitor has gone to a lot of trouble to send his flowers to your regional judging or show. Other exhibitors, traveling some distance and carrying their plants by automobile or other conveyance, occasionally have a problem.

Strong winter winds in some areas will blow anything apart as it emerges from a car. I am not asking for a relaxation of quality however, simply for perspective.

Just because there is a score sheet dividing 100 points into various categories for paphiopedilums (or other genera) does not mean that a judge cannot use the general point scale, or that he cannot put down a total without going through all the gymnastics of scoring each category. The more experienced a judge becomes, the more apt he is to use a simpler system. It is frightful to see judges pore over a score sheet, using the eraser more than the lead. There are times when judges get so involved with attributing points to every small category that the overall picture of the flower is not viewed in proper perspective. In such cases the flower is not fairly judged and is most often penalized. Five words about nit-picking. Leave it to the simians! I refer to many irregularities in paphiopedilums: warts, bumps, variations - all normal and minor differences - between right and left sides. The big picture is most important. Paphiopedilums have characters. Please do not score it out!

I emphasize that the American Orchid Society must strive for more consistency throughout all its judging areas. Its judging standards must be re-evaluated continually and, hopefully, elevated as new hybrids are introduced. We could start by eliminating the HCC!