

HOW TO ESTABLISH AN ORCHID SOCIETY

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Hours of operation:

9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., ET
Monday through Friday

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The First Steps	Page 1
Gathering Momentum	Page 1
The Seminar	Page 3
Organizational Meeting	Page 4
Establishing the Society	Page 6
AOS Membership & Affiliation	Page 7
Shows	Page 7
Study Groups	Page 7
Conclusion	Page 7

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THE FIRST STEPS

- A few individuals in an area decide to try to contact other orchid growers and determine if they can generate interest in a society.
- A few individuals contact the nearest orchid society to see if they would like to take on the task of helping to form a satellite society with the definite understanding that the new group will be on its own within one year or when it's able. Of course, if there is already an orchid society in your city, the American Orchid Society (AOS) does not suggest that you attempt to ask any of the members to assist in forming a splinter group.
 1. If you do not know anyone in the nearest orchid society, contact AOS Headquarters and ask to be put in touch with a person in a neighboring society who might be interested in spearheading such a project.
 2. If a neighboring society is to be the "parent" group, a committee should be appointed by the established group to be the liaison between them and the satellite society.

GATHERING MOMENTUM

The following has proven to be a successful way of launching an orchid society whether by a few individuals or with the support of a neighboring orchid society. If there is a sponsoring society, all of the following should be planned together by the liaison committee or person and the initial contact persons in the new city.

- Secure a public place for an orchid exhibit. A mall is a good place for exposure to the public. The mall will usually welcome such a beautiful display and also will help with the publicity. Sometimes a garden center or other civic building will be a better place to hold the display. Choose a date three to six months away to give time for proper planning. Consider the availability of orchids in bloom. Sometimes the local growers can provide enough orchids in bloom for a lovely display. If another society is taking on the group as a satellite, the liaison person should bring plants from the members of that society.
- Plan the orchid exhibit for two to three days to attract as much interest as possible. Thursday, Friday and Saturday have been successful days.

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- Obtain a site for the organizational meeting and two to three dates reserved.
- Publicity is the key.
 1. Contact local newspapers. Take an orchid to place on the right person's desk and include care instructions. If you start far enough in advance, with enough perseverance, you may get a positive article, complete with a colorful orchid picture, published just a day or two before the exhibit. (Check your paper's timetable; at the *Miami Herald*, for example, it's a week before.) Be sure the dates of the exhibit and the seminar are prominently mentioned. Have a list of article topics and a list of members the writer can contact for a story. Provide a list of places a photographer can visit to shoot some photos. For newspapers, begin at least three months in advance.
 2. Fliers are also an effective way to publicize your display. Place them in cooperating malls, garden centers, libraries, on bulletin boards, mailed to garden clubs, etc. Include a line drawing of an orchid bloom, the display location, date, time, the name of the seminar and its date and time, plus a couple of lines of copy inviting everyone to attend. Mention that efforts to establish a local orchid society are underway. Include a name and telephone number in all advance publicity so that if a person is interested but cannot attend the seminar, contact can be made.
 3. Both TV and radio stations usually have "public bulletin boards" which will announce the events.
 4. Place a book at the display site with a prominent sign stating that anyone desiring more information about growing orchids should leave his or her name, address and telephone number, and information will be forwarded.
 5. Obtain a supply of the AOS membership brochures and place at the display site as well as at the seminar.
- Plan a seminar for the last day of the display: a Saturday morning, a Sunday afternoon or an evening when anyone interested in growing orchids will be able to attend. Title the seminar "You Can Grow Orchids," "Orchids as Houseplants," or some other intriguing title which suggests that anyone can grow orchids. Emphasis should be placed on culture.
- It is a good idea for local growers and/or members of the sponsoring Society to be present at the display as much as possible. Interested people will be more likely to sign up for a seminar if they can talk to someone first.

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THE SEMINAR

- Two hours are usually adequate for the seminar. The speakers should be able to hold their audience's attention. Superior knowledge is not as important in this instance as the ability to transmit enthusiasm. The objective is to make each participant feel that growing orchids is fun, easy, rewarding and that he/she really wants to get involved.

- There should be a written agenda. Following is a suggested agenda:
 1. One of two AOS videos - "The Many Worlds of Orchids" or "An Introduction to Orchids" — are great ways to begin. Both can be secured from the AOS; contact our Awards Registrar for more information. (And remember that you'll need to have on hand a VCR and screen equipment.)
 2. "Growing Orchids in (name of town)" — Here is where you will need an enthusiastic speaker. Choose one able to impart basic knowledge in an interesting manner about the easiest genera for beginners and how to grow orchids on the windowsill or at other locations in the home.
 3. "Your Own Greenhouse" — Have another speaker for this project. There are all kinds of resources for material on building greenhouses. Incorporate some of this into this section. Some people will usually attend just to find out more about greenhouses. Don't get too technical, however. An overview, slides of some greenhouses and equipment to whet their appetite, then a handout of names and addresses of vendors is all that's needed. If it is possible to have a mini "greenhouse tour" of a couple of the local greenhouses after the seminar, interest will be stimulated.
 4. A potting demonstration is sometimes included. Again, keep it moving and make it interesting.
 5. Door Prizes/Orchid Plant -- Mature, blooming plants should be the prizes, even if this means that fewer prizes can be given.
 6. Announce the date of the "organizational meeting" (should be within two weeks) of a local orchid group which will be a satellite of the Orchid Society. Ask those who can come to sign up. It is sometimes good to have each individual indicate his/her preference. This way, you will get more names to contact later if they do not come.

- If there is a sponsoring society, membership forms from that society should be available at this seminar, and dues should be collected with the understanding that

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there will be no extra dues during the time that the new group is a satellite of the Orchid Society.

- Refreshments are optional depending on space, etc. Many successful first seminars are held without refreshments, especially if the crowd is large; however, coffee and/or punch are always nice.

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

The liaison person from the sponsoring society or a member of the group starting the new society should be in charge of this meeting. Other members of the sponsoring society should be in attendance. Refreshments should definitely be available for the break time.

- Suggested agenda for the organizational meeting:
 1. Have name tags available for everyone. Put name and "Greenhouse," "Windowsill" or "Lights" on the tag.
 2. Begin with an opening statement about what an orchid society is, what it does and what you envision this one doing. Explain what the AOS is and how it relates to local groups, as well as the services given to local orchid societies by the AOS. Have on hand some AOS informational brochures. Each person who is not an AOS member should receive one of these colorful and fact-filled marketing tools.
 3. Have each person introduce himself, tell how many orchids he presently has and how he has been growing them. If he has a greenhouse, have him tell what kind, how large, etc. Also ask each person if he or she is a member of the AOS. If you can, get each person to talk long enough for the others to get to know him/her. Pay close attention to the answers because you are going to need to know whom to suggest for certain jobs.
 4. Talk about meeting places and possible dates. Sometimes a committee is appointed to study places to meet and report at the next meeting. Discuss the dates so that participants can think about them during the break; vote on the meeting date when the break is over.

Announce that they need to get acquainted with one another at the break because, after the break, elections will be held for chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer and secretary. You should at least have a person in mind for chairman, if possible.

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- . By the time you have listened to everyone tell about themselves, you should have a good idea of persons who would be good for vice-chairman, secretary and treasurer. The break is a good time to talk to these people and see how responsive they will be to the jobs. If you can announce that a person has agreed to take a job, and have somebody ready to nominate him/her, things usually move faster.
- 5. When the meeting is reconvened, vote on the date and site.
- 6. List each job, describe the duties, then take nominations and have everyone vote. The following are job descriptions generally used for the respective jobs:
 - ◇ Chairman: Preside over the meetings; make sure a written notice is sent out each month. Do whatever is necessary to hold the group together and get the new group going.
 - ◇ Vice-Chairman: Work on the programs. Provide any equipment needed (projector, screen, etc.). Become familiar with the sources and methods of obtaining programs so he/she can either take over the job when the group is on its own or help the person who does.
 - ◇ Secretary: Take minutes of each meeting (including this one). Mail notice before each meeting notifying members and potential members of the program topic, etc.
 - ◇ Treasurer: Open a bank account. Keep the books. Give a written report at each meeting which will then be made a part of the secretary's minutes.
- The next order of business should be committee chairman. The following are needed:
 1. Hospitality Chairman: In charge of acquiring refreshments for each meeting. Usually, at an early meeting, a sheet is passed around and the members put down their names for the month they would like to furnish refreshments. The committee chairman only has to call and remind the persons responsible for the current month's refreshments.
 2. Raffle/Door Prize Chairman: One of the money-making projects used by most groups is a plant raffle at each meeting. Anyone who knows how to find sources for orchids and who has a place to keep them would be good for this chairmanship.

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If there are no volunteers for the committee positions, wait and let the chairman quietly discuss the positions with various people to find the best person for each job.

ESTABLISHING THE SOCIETY

It is very important to keep all members in contact with each other, especially in the beginning.

- Begin and end meetings on time. The chairman should take over the business part of the meeting. The order in which business matters, programs, exhibition tables and other features will be considered will be determined by practice. The presiding officer must be alert at all times to forestall long discussions on trivial matters which might better be handled by the Executive Board. Inform speakers as to the desired length of the program at the time the arrangements are made.
- After two or three months, hold an auction or plant sale to raise funds to establish a treasury. It also gets all members working on something that is fun and rewarding. Remember, in order to encourage new orchid growers (and gain new members for your Society!) plant sales to the public should feature only healthy, well-established plants, preferably with easy cultural requirements.
- A potting party at a member's home is another good outside activity which should be held as early as weather allows. Order plants from a commercial firm; large plants which need dividing can usually be obtained from a commercial firm at a good price. The members can get together and divide the plants. Each person should be able to pot and take home at least one plant to grow.
- The early programs at the meetings should be pretty basic, with lots of time for questions, etc. Sources for speakers and ideas for topics and activities are a problem for all societies, but the AOS Speakers List and slide shows are a great place to start looking! These items can be obtained by contacting the Society's Awards Registrar. (However, to "borrow" slide programs and videos, you'll need for your society to become officially Affiliated with the AOS [see section below].)
- After six months or so, form a bylaws committee to draft bylaws for your local group. Request copies of their bylaws from other Affiliated Societies, to use as a guide in drafting yours. Also, the AOS's Bylaws may be used as a guide. Please contact our Executive Secretary for a copy.

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AOS AFFILIATION

The requirements for Affiliation with the AOS are few. First, the society or organization must maintain an AOS membership in its name. Second, the society must appoint a representative (the AOS Rep) who also maintains an AOS membership. As soon as the local society is on its own, an application for Affiliation should be requested from the AOS and returned as soon as possible. There is no charge for Affiliation — and the benefits of Affiliation are many!

SHOWS

It is important to plan an exhibition or a show for the new Society within a year or so after it officially becomes a Society. The AOS can provide the name of the nearest regional judging chairman. He or she will be glad to ask a judge from that region to help the new Society with its first show plans. Study the most current edition of the AOS's *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition*. Plan a program to explain to members how to groom plants, bring them in, how they are judged.

STUDY GROUPS

The formation of study groups, new member groups and other activities within the orchid Society will provide the basis for growth to keep your Society strong over the years.

LIBRARY

It's never too early to begin assembling educational material for general use by your local membership. Orchid books, periodicals, commercial grower catalogs, etc., are terrific instructional and enlightening resources for your group. Be sure to set up the browsing and borrowing rules early and smartly. Contact other local societies to learn about the pitfalls to avoid when setting up library.

CONCLUSION

This information may not have answered all of your questions. If you have further questions about the formation of an orchid society, please write to the American Orchid Society, 10901 Old Cutler Road, Coral Gables, Florida 33156-4233.

The AOS Trustees and Officers extend all good wishes for a successful undertaking and look forward to a report of your progress.