

ORCHIDIZING

WHAT SHOULD A HOBBYIST LOOK FOR IN THE PURCHASE OF SEEDLINGS?

Frank Fordyce

There are certain "signs" one looks for in purchasing any merchandise. The homemaker looks for certain indications of freshness, ripeness, etc., as she shops for the family table. Her husband looks for certain "signs" as he shops for a second car at the used car lot, evenly worn tires, believable mileage, non-smoking exhaust fumes, etc.

In the purchase of orchids there are certain "signs" we look for that indicate strong, healthy plants. The rules are not hard and fast but a few helpful tips that may mean the difference!

1. Note if the entire block of plants grow evenly. If the block is erratic, check the parentage to see why. If you understand the reason and still wish to buy, select the stronger plants.

2. Choose a seedling with the most robust new growth, making certain there has been a substantial increase in bulb or growth size from its original bulb or growth to its present growth.

3. Avoid weedy growers unless direct parentage denotes this habit of growth. Direct *Sophranitis* hybrids might well have small multiple growths without much progression in bulb size. Frequently large seedlings with an oversupply of weak growths never mature a bulb large enough to bloom.

4. Inspect surface roots to see if they are solid or spongy and decayed. If decayed it could indicate too much moisture around the root system, and the plant living on foliar feeding alone.

5. If leaves are light green and fairly firm this usually indicates good health. If soft and floppy the seedlings have possibly been grown too wet and dark.

6. If advertised as a 3" pot seedling the plant should adequately fill a 3" pot. Some growers advertise a 3" pot at what appears to be an extremely low price but in reality the plants are 2" pot size overpotted into 3". Remember also that the genus involved often designates the size of plant. For example a *Cymbidium* seedling in a 3" pot is several years from blooming while a *Sophranitis* hybrid may be blooming size in the same pot size.

7. In genera that have new leaves emerging from the center of the new growth (such as *Cymbidiums*) be sure to choose a seedling where the center leaf is still growing. When the center leaves have finished their growth, the bulb or basal growth has reached its maturity. One desires as large a bulb as possible before reaching maturity, thereby insuring a stronger reservoir for the next new growth to draw from.

8. In larger clones choose plants that have a minimum of dormant bulbs. Too many dormant bulbs often indicate a poor root system.

9. Look for old flower stems, if plants are *proven* mature clones, to check if they bloom well.

10. Know your grower, ask questions as to the plant performance, possible deformities, etc.

Guidelines, yes, but certainly not complete answers to the purchase of plants. That is part of the intrigue in our wonderful world of orchids!

DO MERICLONES REPLACE SEEDLINGS?

Being among the pioneers in the field of mericlones I am continually pressed with the aforementioned question. From the beginning I have taken the following stand and today I am even more firmly convinced of its practicability.

a. Mericlones do not replace seedlings. Without seedlings we will soon have nothing new to meristem. We must continue to breed new varieties, select the finest and meristem them.

b. I believe mericlones are good for our trade. They may stimulate hybridizers into growing larger blocks of their own seedlings from which to choose clones to meristem. Certainly they will be more selective in their breeding programs if they are to grow quantities themselves!

c. Mericlones are certainly a most welcome addition for hobbyists who may now add proven varieties at low prices while they still continue the intrigue of buying seedlings.

d. Each person has within his being a driving desire to own something no one else owns. Call it a status symbol, selfishness or anything your heart desires, it is within all of us in one degree or another. In orchids we answer this desire by blooming a seedling — something we own in its entirety.

e. I sincerely believe mericlones are an asset to our industry and to your hobby. They will take their place in grower's catalogs as another page from which you may choose those items that please you most.

f. Mericlones do not take the place of seedlings — nor seedlings the place of mericlones. It is not seedlings or mericlones. *But seedlings and mericlones hand in hand!*

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