



# Central Illinois Orchid Society Newsletter

January 2017

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## In this Issue

- From the president
- Next meeting
- Events in the area
- Orchid of the month
- Membership renewal
- Member profile
- Notes and tips

### Contact us at:

[www.ciorchidsociety.org](http://www.ciorchidsociety.org)

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Central Illinois Orchid Society Newsletter is published monthly. Subscription is through membership in the Society.

Membership is \$15/person and \$25/couple. Please visit our home page for Membership form and mailing address.

### CIOS Officers for 2016

- Joanne Miller, President
- Linda Bailey, Vice Pres. /Secretary
- Terry Moore and Linda Bial, Show & Sale co-chairs
- Mark Williams, Treasurer
- Mitzi Williams, Editor, Newsletter & Webpage

## From the President:

Happy New Year, Orchid Society members! Hope you had a nice holiday break and are ready to get back to your orchids. My Paphiopedilums are looking great and I have 4 blooming right now, which makes my room awesome!

I thought I'd give you some tips today about how to tell if your Orchids are happy! Doesn't everyone want happy orchids? ☺ Since roots are the secret to an orchid grower's success, your plant must have a vigorous root system. Check the roots once in a while and look at them. There should be a 10 to 1 ratio of the roots to the shoots. And if you have great roots, you'll have beautiful flowers. When your plant is in the growing stage, it should have long green root tips. You can tell an orchid enthusiast if they are excited about the nice root tips the plant has!

Are the leaves thick and turgid? If they look dehydrated, they probably are. Perhaps you need to increase your watering frequency? Maybe you need to repot your orchid in new media and get rid of the dead roots so there is more room for the healthy ones. Are the pseudobulbs and canes plump? They should be full of water and energy reserves to get your orchids through dry spells. Then they will have enough energy to develop flowers.

Don't forget to fertilize. Fertilizer contains the essential mineral building blocks for your plant. Get into a fertilizer routine. A monthly application of seaweed or kelp, which contains some plant hormones, will encourage new growths on your plant. You'll see an improvement in growth vigor. Also, be vigilant looking for disease and pests. Orchids are pretty hardy, but you should always be checking for scale, mealy bugs, mites and other critters. And if you find some, don't hesitate to apply insecticidal soap or your choice of insect control. Bugs spread fast and you don't want to infect your other plants.

Hope to see you next Monday at our Orchid Society Meeting. We will enjoy a movie entitled The Judge, the Hunter, the Thief and the Black Orchid, complete with popcorn! Friends are welcome!

Happy Blooming!  
Joanne Miller, CIOS President

## Next meeting:

- Our next meeting is on Monday, January 9, 6:30 p.m. at Hessel Park Church. The feature program is a documentary video entitled: The judge, the hunter, the thief, and the black orchid, directed by Rich Walton. We will also be discussing plans for the 2017 Show and Sale taking place on Saturday, March 4, 2017 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. **Please note the Nov.-Dec. issue contained an incorrect date and time of the Show and Sale!**

Future meetings are listed under the "Meetings and Calendar" page of our website. The calendar will be updated as we have more information. Please take a look and mark your calendar for all the meetings.

## Events in the area:

- January 6-July 9/2017 Orchids in Watercolor exhibit (in the Alliance Gallery); and
- February 10 - March 5, 2017 "Orchids in Cultivating Beauty" orchid show and sale (in the Elder Greenhouse). Indianapolis Museum of Art, 4000 Michigan Rd., Indianapolis, Ind. For more info, see: <http://www.imamuseum.org/exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions>
- February 4-March 26, 2017. Orchid Show: "All Vanilla" at the Missouri Botanical Garden. 4344 Shaw Blvd, St. Louis, MO 63110. Some fees apply. For more info, see <http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/>
- February 11 (12-4pm)-12 (12-3pm), 2017. Prairie State Orchid Society Annual Show and Sale. Washington Park Botanical Garden, Springfield IL. For further details, see [www.prairiestateorchids.org](http://www.prairiestateorchids.org) or check their Face Book page.

## Orchid of the month:

This month, a limited selection of the plants posted by our members on our Face Book page in recent months are shown. There are a lot more to see on the Face Book page, showing how talented our members are. Great job, everyone!



A group of Paphs (J. Miller)

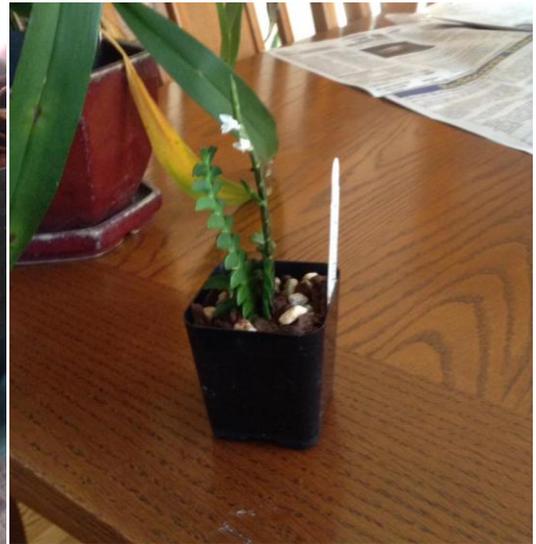


Oncidium Twinkle (center) & Dendrobium Mini Snowflake (C. Westfall)





Darwinara Charm 'Blue Star' & Bc. Yen Corona 'Green Genie' (L. Bial)



Angraecum birremense (T. Moore) Bulbophyllum medusae (L. Bial)

Angraecum distichum (L. Bailey)

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## Member profile: Bettina Francis

### **Killing Orchids** By Bettina Francis

At almost every CIOS orchid sale, someone looks at the plants, wistfully, and leaves without buying. They often say “I had an orchid once, but I killed it.” Clearly the loss was traumatic, and they will not risk a repetition.

I was lucky: my first two orchids survived for over 10 years, and bloomed yearly for most of that time. But, I actually killed my third orchid, a Phlaenopsis (“Phal” for short), on purpose by throwing it out. It developed yellow streaks on its leaves, and the vendor said it probably had a virus.

That gave me the illusion that I knew how to grow orchids. I could rebloom a dendrobium and a vanda, and I knew that virus infections were incurable. So I thought I was an orchid expert, and bought another.

Phalaenopsis -- the easy orchid, right? If you can grow African violets, you can grow Phals! Somehow, I forgot that I *couldn't* grow African violets -- if they don't actually die, they certainly stop blooming and sulk along in a pitiful heap of straggly leaves. But I could grow orchids! Only, my luck ran out at this point. The second Phal died of crown rot-- if water sits in the growing tip of a phal, a fungal infection often develops. Because phals have only one growth center, they die if it rots. I reasoned that accidents happen even to experts, and replaced it with a 3rd Phalaenopsis, blooming size, but not yet bloomed. The vendor thought it would be yellow. It spiked each year, but as a bud grew to the size of a pea, it dropped off. Bud after bud, year after year ... I decided to avoid buying more Phals until I could get this one to bloom - and I couldn't. Luckily, I eventually fell for a blooming Phalaenopsis - and it bloomed again the next year! And the next! Meanwhile, my 3rd Phal kept dropping buds. So once again, I deliberately killed it because an orchid that won't bloom is not worth keeping.

Five years after my first orchids, I had a library of orchid books. I could recognize the 'alliances' such as Cattleya, Oncidium, Vanda, and Phalaenopsis. I knew that Phals are sensitive to crown rot, that viruses are incurable, that it's safer to buy orchids in bloom, because then you know that they *do* bloom. I knew it all! So why did my orchids keep dying?

In fact, there was another lesson, which I had learned only too well. I never, ever, *ever* overwatered my orchids! Every orchid book tells you that overwatering orchids leads to rotted roots and dead plants. The author then mentions that it is hard to tell the symptoms of overwatering from under watering – but that most people over-water, and this must be avoided at all costs. So I emphatically did not over-water! In fact, I under-watered to a surprising degree, partly out of fear of overwatering, partly because it was easy to put off watering for a day (which could easily become several days, or a week). And that was on top of being careful not to over-water: my plants were living in drought. Some of my Oncidiums developed accordion-pleated leaves, a clear symptom of under-watering, and I would make the effort to water more often. But many of my orchids just bloomed less and less each year until they finally died, or they hung on, but refused to bloom. The flowers on those that did bloom did not last as long as the books said they should.

About eight years ago, the situation became critical. I was busy at work, and put off watering more than usual for most of a winter. And woke up one day to realize that if I didn't do something better, most of my orchids would be dead. I wasn't getting flowers – and most orchids are pretty only when they bloom. My son commented that an out-of-bloom Cattleya was the ugliest plant he'd ever seen.

In desperation, I transplanted all of my orchids to a medium that makes it hard to underwater, and this system works for me. Today I reliably bloom both Phalaenopsis and Cattleyas. My record is 19 flowers at one time on LC Acker's Madison 'Kyle' – and it rebloomed 6 months later! This year, two of my Phals have 2 spikes apiece, and my warmth-tolerant Cymbidiums bloom each winter.

I've now been growing orchids for 25 years, and I am still killing them. Not all of them, not even a majority these days – but they still die. Occasionally a Phal succumbs to crown rot; others languish because I'm still under watering. Some die because squirrels knock them out of the pot as they summer outdoors – the price I pay for giving them light and air and humidity! But the rest bloom so much better that it's worth it.

Most often, an orchid dies because I cannot meet its needs. Masdevallias need cool, moist conditions. Indoor house temperatures are fine, but too dry. Illinois summers are humid enough, but too hot. Many orchid



Lc. Acker's Madison 'Kyle'



Some of Bettina's flowers

growers work around these problems but I can't. In effect, I don't have the right conditions for these cool-growing orchids *because it is too much trouble for me*. So I have finally learned the most important lesson of orchid growing: know what conditions you can manage – and buy orchids that like those conditions!

I have also accepted the fact that I will kill some orchids, even when they are not really misfits for my growing conditions. That non-blooming Vanda will go to a sale next year, and I don't buy Masdevallias anymore. I am scrupulous in cleaning tools between pruning plants. Twenty-six (26) plants lost to virus is enough. But there are always orchids blooming – especially in winter, because they are my protection against cold and gloom.

## Membership renewal:

If you have not done so, please renew your membership. The dues are \$15 for a single member; \$25 for a couple. Please make your check payable to CIOS and mail to: Mark Williams, CIOS Treasurer, 3208 S. First St., Champaign IL 61822. Please note any change on your mailing or e-mail address.

## Notes and tips:

- It is frigid out there! Your plants are not actively growing, but the flowers are developing and even blooming. Watering is very tricky during the cold months. My first orchid was a Phalaenopsis which grew pea size buds, but one by one, the bud yellowed and dropped. Familiar? Many of my Cattleya types, with sheaths bulging with buds inside, suddenly turned brown and rotted (also called blasting.) Many sources, including the one from AOS, list a variety of reasons, among them "over or under watering." "Well, which?" you ask. I then noticed that none blasted when no water was given while I was away for 7-10 days, so I suspected that the normal watering combined with low temperatures during daytime and even lower night time (in my case 60°F) might be the cause. So, I now mist the leaves, the exposed roots and the top of the pot a little. New buds appeared at the tip and is growing, and the Cattleya hybrids with buds have not blasted. I water Phals, Paphs and Phrags thoroughly, but not as often as I do when warm. They are all showing flower spikes. Keeping my fingers crossed!