



# THE MONTHLY BULLETIN OF THE KU-RING-GAI ORCHID SOCIETY INC.

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**Next Meeting :** \* \* \* **Still no meetings just yet** \* \* \*. Once again we have had to cancel the next meeting. The rules still just make it a bit impractical in our small hall. We are hoping for a meeting in December, which would be our first meeting for a long time but if it is, please note it will be Dec 13<sup>th</sup> and a party is unlikely.

**A wonderful Virtual Benching** yet again this month. And what a startling display of highly coloured Sarcochilus hybrids '*benched*' by the D'Oliers and also a two beauties from Jessie and Jenny.



I can only guess where these beauties came from, but in recent years a nursery called Barrita Orchids at Kulnura, north of Sydney, has led the world in developing brightly coloured Sarcochilus as wonderfully decorative plants for hobby growers.

I doubt there would be a single orchid grower in Sydney who doesn't have a few Sarcochilus stashed away among their collection somewhere. They have been the focus of Australian breeders for multiple generations and many greatly improved shapes and colours were developed. Much of the groundwork in exploring the gene pool was done by breeders like Dave Butler and others, but even so, it was not that long ago that 90% of Sarcochilus were still white, or red and white, albeit vastly improved over the natural species.

Now, thanks to intensive development, especially by Scott Barrie at Barrita, all that has changed very quickly. First we saw concentration of developing the red in the centre of the flower that comes naturally from Sarc. hartmannii and Sarc. fitzgeraldii, until a few fully red flowered cultivars were seen in some crosses. This progressed to reliably fully red flowered crosses, and then not long after, reliable yellows, oranges and other combinations.

It is amazing to me just how quickly this has progressed and every year we now see tables of bright coloured Sarcs in flower at high volume retailers like Bunnings Warehouse. It is not just the specialist orchid grower benching these lovely orchids at meeting, it is every gardener who is taken by their exciting colours and compact plant form. Hmm, that sounds like a close parallel to the development of their cousin, the Phalaenopsis as a house plant.

So how do you tell someone how to grow a Sarcochilus? I am no expert myself so I decided to see what the internet tells those who search for growing advice. Lots and lots of different advice. Scott produces thousands of them in top class condition, but sometimes the way a nurseryman grows them isn't always compatible with the general practices of hobbyists. For example Scott very successfully uses his own growing mix of perlite, horticultural rockwool, and styrene but I for one can't grow anything in that. Just the same, I am very impressed by Scott's article explaining what it is that needs to be done for Sarcochilus, and why it needs to be done. ([Read more on page 2.](#))

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**Society News** (if anyone has a news item, please phone Jim on 9476 3383, or email at [jimbrydie@aussiebroadband.com.au](mailto:jimbrydie@aussiebroadband.com.au) )

**President Dennys' Desk** – Well it seems the KMC hall restriction is still in place, but we are keeping a close eye on the situation and looking forward to that time when we can advise members that we are all systems go again. However, if we do have a meeting in December, please note that it will be on **Monday the 13th of December**.

**Printer problems** – Apologies to those members who have to receive their bulletins by mail. The delay was caused by a printer failure, and it took some time to get it repaired.

**More orchids in the news** – I often browse the internet for Australian news on orchids. I recently came across this find of a discovery of endangered orchids in the Southern highlands. It is an interesting article and gives some insight into the NSW Government's "Saving our Species program". The link follows:

<https://www.southernhighlandnews.com.au/story/7254050/endangered-orchid-population-found-in-the-southern-highlands/>

**Our shop** – We are still selling pots, clips, stakes, labels, and fertiliser. If you need any of these supplies, please send an email with your needs and we will see what we can do. If you need only fertiliser then please contact Ann Byron directly, especially if you live down St. Ives way.

**Virtual benching Issue #17** – Thank you again to all those members who contributed to this issue. I could not choose a special one or two or three ..... since I just could not make up my mind. However, that said, it was nice to see Mary Ahonen's contribution that I mentioned in the October bulletin and the supporting text that Jenny had generated. Thank you, Jenny and her supporters, for another fine edition. I am sure we are generating a resource that will be invaluable for the future members of our society.

For those who like a web link, all 'VB" issues are at: <https://kuringaiorchidsociety.org.au/virtual-benching-2020-21/>

**Member's welfare** – Some members are still contacting me which is wonderful. If you are aware of any of our members having difficulties with the isolation caused by COVID restrictions, then please let a committee member know. Alternatively, if any member needs to have a chat, then they are most welcome to contact me at any time, 24/7 on 043 88 77 689 – please keep safe and conscious of the need to wear a mask. Hopefully as the lockdown conditions are lifted, we can get quickly get back to being more normal.

**New Member** – A new member has joined us since the last newsletter so I welcome Nathan Fisher to the society. We apologise in advance for these trying times with no meetings Nathan. I hope we can soon welcome you in person.

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**Growing Sarcochilus** by Scott Barrie, from the Barrita Orchids website - <https://barritaorchids.com/>

A Sarcochilus plant consists of basically leaves and roots. As such, it has very little water storage in comparison to other orchid plants, such as a Cymbidium, which can store enough water/moisture to survive for many months of dry or drought conditions. This tells us straight away that a Sarcochilus is expecting a consistent or regular supply of moisture. I say moisture as this encompasses more than just water. In the natural/wild growing conditions of monopodial orchids, it is often high humidity that hydrates the plant more so than rain.

**Potting mix** - We chose to use inert media for all our orchids. Perlite mixed with Horticultural Rockwool and styrene in roughly thirds, has proven over many years to give excellent results for us. Choosing a media for your own conditions and the intensity of your activity or connection with your plants is very important. This media dries quickly and so requires regular watering, every day or two in small pots, to prevent it drying out. Media proportions may be varied to hold moisture for a longer period to suit individual needs. The reason we choose this inorganic media is the stability. This media will never change, no decomposition, no reduction of air spaces in the pot and most importantly of all no need to remove the media at repot time. Sarcochilus can be suckers after repotting. The less disruption caused to the roots, the happier the plant will be. If you chose to move it to another media, look for one that will retain moisture while not breaking down too rapidly.

**Water and fertilizer** - As I said in the opening paragraph, Sarcochilus plants have very little water storage, so providing moist media is crucial to success. Our media has a very high, air-filled porosity and consequently dries very fast. This leads us to irrigate frequently. A Sarco should never dry out completely. To dry out will stop the growth of a plant and once it stops a period of "sulking" will follow. We only use liquid fertilizer, provided as often as possible is best. A good quality balanced fertilizer is important, and we prefer our fertilizer slightly lower in nitrogen than the other macronutrients. A 10:15:15 NPK balance is quite acceptable for the winter period and 15:10:15 for the summer time. The most important part of fertilizing is to keep the concentration low.

**Light levels** - Light equals flowers. Traditionally Sarcos have been grown in low-light conditions, an interpretation from viewing wild plants growing in shaded locations. However, shady growing has the effect of limiting flower production. The plant reacts to the light it is given. Leaves are the plants light collectors, how the plant feeds itself. Plants change leaf angle and arrangement to catch as much light as possible or as needed for growth. Example. A plant grown in too low light will elongate in the stem and orientate it's leaves to face the light. In a Sarco, the plant will go almost vine like in growth habit. The growth will lay down flat and arrange it's leaves in a fan pattern. A plant growing in maximum light will have shortened stems and a compact leaf arrangement. In Sarcos we see an upright growth habit with leaves tucked into the rosette. The plant grown in shady conditions will have a lush and luxurious

appearance. But, will not produce the flower spikes of the tougher high-light plant. The presentation of the flower spike will always be pendant in low light.

**Temperature** - Our temperature range (at Barrita) is from 1 degree Celsius minimum in winter and we will have maximum summer temperatures of high 40s. *Sarcocilus* grow naturally where the temperatures go below freezing, but only for a short while. When we have excessive high temperatures, we mist the environment to help the plants cope. *Sarcocilus* need to have at least 6 weeks of nightly minimum below 13 degrees Celsius to initiate spikes. Once this initiation period is over you can heat them to get flowers out early, but this can have an effect on the longevity of the blooms. We prefer to let them elongate naturally.

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**Softcane Season** – There were some lovely ‘softcane’ pictures in the virtual benching this month and although it will be past the peak of their Sydney season by the time you get this, there will still be many more about to delight us.



But what really is a ‘softcane’? We all commonly use colloquial terms like softcane and hardcane, but don’t you sometimes wonder what actually separates one from the other?

I thought I might take this opportunity to discuss the matter a little further, but if more experienced growers don’t need the explanation they might wish to skip a few paragraphs at this point.

First off, the genus *Dendrobium* is one of the biggies with over 1500 species, with some so different looking you would wonder how in the world they could possibly all be *Dendrobiums*. Common sense has dictated the subdivision of the genus into groups of species that are more closely related. It seems inevitable that *Dendrobium* will eventually be broken up into multiple smaller genera, but in the meantime we have a huge genus split into Sections.

Next, the ‘soft’ bit. Compared to some other *Dendrobiums*, softcanes do have sort of softer fleshed pseudobulbs but they aren’t all that soft. For example, it doesn’t mean soft like limp celery. If you have **very** strong fingers you might crush the flesh of a softcane pseudobulb but it is generally stiff and stands upright. It’s a bit bendy if you apply force but you can feel it isn’t meant to be bent and if you try to bend it too much it will collapse the tissue (squish it).

So the ‘soft’ of a softcane is just a relative term and refers to them being ‘soft’ in comparison to the ‘very stiff’, woody pseudobulbs (or canes) of *Dendrobiums* like those of *Den. bigibbum* and *Den. phalaenopsis* (Den. Section *Phalaenanche*), or the antelope Dens. from Section *Spatulata*. These two sections are often hybridised. Hybrids within each of these sections and between them are very popular but tend to be warm growing types. Hence the general association of hardcanes being warm growers.

Softcane *Dendrobiums* come from *Dendrobium Section Dendrobium* which is based upon the species *Dendrobium nobile*. The majority of these grow in monsoonal areas where they experience a long dry winter where the orchids go into a slowed, resting state that allows them to tolerate much colder dryer conditions.

There are about 60 species in Section *Dendrobium* and while all of the section do have relatively soft canes in the broadest definition, many of that ‘60’ don’t really fit the description of what we horticulturally regard as “Softcane *Dendrobiums*”. “Softcanes” really only means about 10 fairly closely related cousin species that have formed the core of hybrid softcane *Dendrobium* breeding. The most included species are Dens. *nobile*, *wardianum*, *heterocarpum*, *regale*, *friedericksianum*, *findleyanum*, *linawianum*, *signatum*, and *pendulum* but there are a few others that have also been used experimentally as parents. *Dendrobium nobile* is massively the dominant parent in the hybrid group.

To illustrate a few of the less close (ie not *Den. nobile* like) cousins from Sect. *Dendrobium*, check out species below like *Den. loddigesii* (a miniature), *lamyaiae*, *leptocladum*, *oligophyllum*, *macarthiae*, and *hekouense*.



**D. oligophyllum**

**D. leptocladum**

**D. hekouense**

**D. loddigesii**

**D. lamyaiae**

**D. maccarthiae**

The shape of a softcane pseudobulb is described as ‘clavate’ meaning club shaped, and refers to the fact that they are quite narrow at the base, broaden over most of the length, and then taper in again at the apex. They grow quite quickly

over a short growing season, and grow upright, but they do need staking while developing because the narrow stem base is a weak point until the stem hardens up later in the season. While actively growing, they can often bend over from the base so that the pseudobulb grows horizontal, or even pendent if you just let them do their own thing. Undisciplined growth arrangement seems especially prone when you mount them in a backyard tree.

The primary softcane species is definitely *Den. nobile*. The first picture at the right is a fairly typical 'nobile' but they vary substantially from one plant to the next. This one is fairly pale and there are many darker, more purple coloured forms. Some can have a lot of white in the inner parts of the sepals and petals where this pictured one is just lighter pink. Shapes vary as well. Some have short wide petals like this one, others have longer narrower petals like the picture of var. *cooksonianum* (far right). Nearly all nobles have the big dark purple 'eye' in the inner part of the lip.



There are many described horticultural forms of *Den. nobile*. Most were described in the early days of orchid growing and the named varieties were related to superiority of form and shape but there is also an all white albino form (*virginalis*) and other white forms with either a yellow centre or green centre. Variety *cooksonianum* is a petaloid form where the petals have some of the characteristics of the lip, with the dark purple of the lip's eye in each petal.

There are many articles available for growing softcanes but the key points are :

1. They are semi dormant from about June through mid September (Sydney). During this period they need good light, enough water to stop them over desiccating, AND NO FERTILISER. They tolerate cold.
2. In mid to late Sept. the flower buds start to show but the plants are not yet growing so mildly increase water BUT NO FERTILISER.
3. By about mid-October (or later depending on breeding) the flowers will open and you will start to see new stem growths beginning at the base of the last growth. As the flowers eventually fade (a few weeks or longer depending on how well you grow) the new stem growth accelerates. Wait until the stems get to 100 - 150mm tall then begin your fertiliser application. The new stems grow very fast because in their natural habitat they are taking advantage of their wet, warm season. Apply water and fertiliser while they are growing
4. By the mid - late May, the stem growth will slow and stop with the last new leaf often standing vertical. Stop again. A curious fact that growers need to know, is that the stems that produce flowers in spring, are NOT the most recently matured canes. It is the cane that matured the year before, and only big enough canes will flower. So don't get too disappointed if your baby orchid doesn't flower just yet.

### **Don't mess with an old dog**

An old Doberman starts chasing rabbits and before long, discovers that he's lost. Wandering about, he notices a panther heading rapidly in his direction with the intention of having lunch.

The old Doberman thinks, "Oh, no! I'm in deep trouble now!"

Noticing some bones on the ground close by, he immediately settles down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the panther is about to leap, the old Doberman exclaims loudly, "Boy, that was one delicious panther! I wonder, if there are any more around here?"

Hearing this, the young panther halts his attack in mid-strike, a look of terror comes over him and he slinks away into the trees. "Whew!", says the panther, "That was close! That old Doberman nearly had me!"

Meanwhile, a squirrel who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree, figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the panther. So, off he goes. The squirrel soon catches up with the panther, spills the beans and strikes a deal for himself with the panther. The young panther is furious at being made a fool of and says, "Here, squirrel, hop on my back and see what's going to happen to that conniving canine!"

Now, the old Doberman sees the panther coming with the squirrel on his back and thinks, "What am I going to do now?" But instead of running, the dog sits down again with his back to his attackers, pretending he hasn't seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old Doberman says : "Where's that squirrel? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another panther!"

Moral of the story. - Don't mess with the old dogs. Age and skill will always overcome youth and treachery! Bulls\*\*t and brilliance only come with age and experience.

**A Parenting Tip** – When you lose your children in the house, turn off your wifi access to the internet. They will come out immediately. Your neighbours may even drop by to ask what's happening.

**The Advantages of being Male** .. You can do Christmas shopping for 25 relatives on December 24 in 25 minutes. You get to play with toys all your life. You only need one wallet, and one pair of shoes - one color for all seasons. You can wear shorts no matter how your legs look. Your underwear is \$8.95 for a 3 pack. Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat. You know stuff about tanks. You can 'do' your nails with a pocket knife.

## Establishing Native Dendrobium Orchids In My Garden --- by John Chang

When I first moved to our new house about 35 years ago, I had with me over 100 pots of flowering size native Dendrobium. The collections mainly consisted of various varieties of Den. speciosum, Den. kingianum, Den. delicatum and Den. suffusum. I did not have a bush house in the new property then. Out of desperation to keep the orchid collections alive, I decided to mass plant the orchids in the garden along one side of the driveway of the new property as part of my landscape design plan. The narrow boundary area is defined by a low retaining wall built by the previous owner. It measures 15 meters long by 1 meter wide running in the east west direction and facing north. Following are the steps I took to establish the orchids in the garden, together with maintenance strategies over the years.

**Ground preparation:** I first laid a layer of sandstone boulders averaging 20cm to 30cm deep to provide a raised natural sandstone layer on top of the garden soil. I then densely planted the orchids using very well drained mixture of 50% of crushed blue metal (average 10mm to 25mm size) and 50% pine bark (10 mm to 50mm size) as planting medium. The average depth of the above planting medium varied from 10cm to 20cm over the sandstone base.

**Planting spacings:** The planting density was approximately 20cm x 20 cm for Den. kingianum and Den. delicatum but with wider spacings of 30cm to 40cm for all Den. speciosum. Den kingianum were planted in the foreground along the edges with taller species behind along the property boundary. The intended dense spacings was to create an instant landscape result for my garden. Wherever possible I directly buried the roots and existing medium from each pot to avoid disturbance to the plant. I also planted sun loving shrubs such as Vireyas and bottlebrush in the background along the boundary line to provide partial shade from intense sun in the north. The entire planting soon established firmly in the ground after one growing season.



**Maintenance:** Watering - Watering was done once a week/fortnight during the initial establishment year but mainly in summer. Once the planting had firmly established in the new ground, watering was only given after hot summer days. Now the orchids rely mainly on natural rain and thrive pretty much with minimum maintenance such as watering and fertilizing. Within a few years, the orchids soon naturalised in the ground and flourished just like those found in the wild.



**Fertiliser:** - Once a year the orchids get a handful of blood and bone fertilizer scattered over them. The rest was left to nature via leaf litter from adjoining shrubs and trees. The orchids were practically self-sustaining and thriving once it was established.

**Pest Control:-** Dendrobium beetles are a persistent pest in warmer months to native orchids growing out in the open. I normally keep an eye over the orchids and adopt a “seek and kill” method once the pest is spotted among the orchids. I use a can of fly spray to instantly kill any sighted nasties during those summer months. The use of fly spray has helped me to keep the beetles partially at bay and without much adverse impact on the orchids over the years.

Overall growing native orchids in the ground is much simpler and easier than growing them in individual pot. It involves minimum care such as watering, fertilizing and no repotting hassle to keep them thriving and blooming year after year. As well there is no need to replace or add potting medium to planting bed in the long run. The orchids will quickly naturalise in the garden once it is established. It provides a yearly eye-catching flowering display and enjoyment for many years to come. Growing native orchids en-masse as garden plants is a worthwhile exercise if one has excess orchids looking for space to grow outside the bush house. This is easily achievable provided that the garden location has good sunny aspect with optimum dapple shade coupled with appropriate ground preparation and suitable growing medium.



*Editorial commentary by Jim : Like all of you I was a bit amazed at John's pictures of his native orchid driveway landscaping in last month's virtual benching. I was thinking 'How on earth did he do that?' Well John has answered all that for us, and here is his blueprint for preparing the environment and getting it done. Can it be this easy? - So now I expect many of you members to drag out all those orchids you don't know what to do with and get them into wonderful landscapes like John has done. And don't forget to take some pictures along your journey. I expect reports from all who are now inspired. Thanks John.*

**My Birthday Present** - Dear Diary, For my 60th birthday my dear daughter Rachel purchased a week of personal training at the local health club for me. Although I am still in great shape, since being a high school cheerleader for the football team 43 years ago, I decided it would be a good idea to go ahead and give it a try.

I called the club and made reservations with a trainer named Brenda, who identified herself as a 26-year-old aerobics instructor and a model. My daughter was pleased with my enthusiasm and got me to keep a diary to chart my progress.

**Monday** : Started my day at 6:00 am. Tough to get out of bed, but it was worth it when I arrived at the health club to find Brenda waiting for me. She is a bit of a Greek goddess - blond hair, dancing eyes and white smile. Woo Hoo!! She gave me a tour and showed me the machines. I enjoyed watching the skillful way in which she conducted her aerobics class after my workout today. Very inspiring! Brenda was encouraging as I did my sit-ups, although my gut was already aching from holding it in the whole time she was around.

**Tuesday** : I drank a whole pot of coffee, but I finally made it out the door. Brenda made me lie on my back and push a heavy iron bar into the air – but then she put weights on it! My legs were a bit wobbly on the treadmill, but I made the full mile. Brenda's rewarding smile made it all worthwhile. I feel GREAT!! It's a whole new life for me.

**Wednesday** : The only way I can brush my teeth is by laying the toothbrush on the counter and moving my mouth back and forth over it. I believe I have a hernia in both pectorals. Driving was OK as long as I didn't try to steer or stop. I parked on top of a GEO in the club parking lot.

Brenda was impatient, insisting that my screams upset other club members. Her voice is a little too perky for early in the morning and when she scolds, she gets this nasally whine. VERY annoying. My chest hurt when I got on the treadmill, so Brenda put me on the stair 'monster'. Why the hell would anyone invent a machine to simulate an activity rendered obsolete by elevators? Brenda told me it would help me get in shape and enjoy life, and some other shit too.

**Thursday** : Brenda was waiting for me with vampire-like teeth exposed. Her thin, cruel lips were set in a snarl. I couldn't help being a ½ hour late, it took that long to tie my shoes. She put me to work on the dumb bells but I hid in the restroom until she sent someone to find me. As punishment, she put me on the rowing machine - which I sank.

**Friday** : I hate Brenda more than any human being has ever hated anyone in the history of the world. Stupid, skinny, anaemic, anorexic little b\*\*\*\*\*! If there was a part of me I could move without unbearable pain, I would beat her with it. She wanted me to work on my triceps but I don't have triceps and if you don't want dents in the floor, don't hand me barbells or anything that weighs more than a sandwich. The treadmill flung me off and I landed on a health and nutrition teacher. Why couldn't it have been someone softer, like the drama coach or the choir director?

**Saturday** : Brenda left a message on my answering machine. Her shrilly voice wondering why I did not show up today. Just hearing her made me want to smash the machine with my planner. I watched 11 straight hours of the Weather Channel

**Sunday** : The Church van is picking me up for services today so I can go and thank GOD that this week is over. I will also pray that next year my nasty little daughter Rachel will choose a gift for me that is more fun - like a root canal or a hysterectomy. I still say if God had wanted me to bend over, he would have sprinkled the floor with diamonds!!!

## Subtle Signs of Virus – The Nurseryman’s test --- by Sue Bottom (St. Augustine Orchid Society, Florida, USA)

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They say that the only way to be sure if a plant is virused is to test it. Now we'll have to add a qualifier to that

statement, "...unless Dave Off is in town". Dave manages [Waldor Orchids](#) in Linwood, New Jersey with other family members. He was vacationing in St. Augustine with his family and spoke to our club. The subject of orchid viruses came up in one of our conversations, and Dave offered to walk through my greenhouse and identify potentially virused orchids. I hoped he would be unsuccessful, because several years ago I discarded about a third of my cattleyas after they tested positive. Unfortunately, Eagle Eye Dave walked through the greenhouse and brought a half dozen or so cattleyas to my attention. Each one later tested positive for virus.



Dave has an internal checklist that he uses to identify virused plants. He looks at the new growth, and it must be at the proper point in its growth cycle, when the leaf is unfolding but before it hardens off. The symptoms on the young leaves are very subtle. On the newest forming leaf, there is a longitudinal streaking running parallel to the veins in the leaf. This streaking does not tend to traverse the entire leaf blade. It is slightly irregular on the horizontal axis, so it is a little blotchy in appearance. The streaking is evident on both the upper and lower leaf surfaces. The discoloration is inside the young leaf, with no sunken areas. This streaking may or may not disappear when the leaf is mature, depending on the severity of the infection. It is best viewed early or late in the day rather than in too bright light.



The chlorotic streaking from virus in young cattleya leaves is very subtle. Dave could predict from the markings whether it was CymMV or ORSV. ORSV streaking tends to be more blotchy and CymMV more linear. The presence or absence of color was also predictive. I'll need a few more lessons to make any educated guesses.

If Dave sees some chlorotic streaking, he starts inspecting the rest of the plant, first looking at the other new growths to see if they too exhibit symptoms. Both top and bottom leaf surfaces are inspected. If virused, the streaking will be visible in all the new growths. He looks at the older part of the plant, perhaps there might be the necrotic black splotches or the reddish purple markings often reported for virused plants. He looks at any flowers that might be present, for signs of color break or necrotic streaking. He looks at the flower sheath for signs of abnormalities. He also evaluates the plant's growth vigor, as virus can sap strength from a plant.

The Phalaenopsis bench was Dave's next target. I have not tested many Phals because of the generally held assumption that many of the Phalaenopsis sold in the mass markets could be virused. Dave found a dozen plants that looked suspicious to him, and upon testing, Dave continued to bat a thousand... more bench space!



*The chlorotic streaking is more obvious in the soft, fleshy Phally leaves. These tested positive for CymMV & ORSV*

In more advanced stages of viral disease, the more commonly recognized signs of virus might appear in the plant. These include the black necrotic blotching often reported for Cymbidium Mosaic Virus (CymMV) or the reddish purple markings of Odontoglossum Ringspot Virus (ORSV) in the leaves. The flowers can show the presence of virus in color break and brown necrotic blossom streak. Even the flower sheaths can express virus symptoms. Dave's chlorotic streaks in young leaves are your early warning system, letting you know there may be something suspicious in your plant.

Careful observation is the key, and testing to verify or refute the presence of virus helps build your knowledge set so

your eyes can be trained to detect the early symptoms of virus. It is not a ‘once and done’ proposition. The plants must be in the proper stage of growth for these subtle signs to manifest themselves. Dave keeps newly arrived plants to his nursery in a staging area for perhaps 18 to 24 months. Changing the plant’s environment can add stress, which can make the symptoms more evident. The plants are inspected regularly as they go through one or two growth cycles under his growing conditions. Only after this observation period are virus free plants allowed to be placed into the general growing areas.



*Often CymMV causes black blotches on the leaves that result in a really ugly plant, although there are other diseases that can cause black splotching.*



*Sometimes ORSV causes circular to angular patterns on the leaves with the discoloration ranging from yellowish to reddish purple to brownish in color.*



*Blossom brown necrotic streak from CymMV (generally thought to be in combination with ORSV) shows up 5-10 days after the flower opens, resulting in unsightly discoloration on the floral segments.*



*Color break from ORSV is a non-symmetrical irregular, marking on the flower. You might simply discard the plant with apparent color break, but thrips or chemicals can cause similar blemishes.*

Dave had some other interesting growing tips. I was repotting a cattleya seedling he gave me and noticed a little wire with a long tail wrapped around the rhizome. Dave said that was an “artificial root” used to hold the seedling stable in the pot. He doesn’t use rhizome clips, so this method allows a young plant with little root mass to be kept from wobbling around in the pot until it grows its own roots.

He doesn’t use rhizome clips on the larger plants either, instead using a potting stick to pack the media tightly around the plants. Potting sticks were commonly used during the era of osmunda fiber, which is no longer available as a potting media. The potting sticks were often made of wood and blamed for spreading virus between plants. Dave’s potting stick is specially fabricated to his specifications, made of fiberglass resin, so it can be sterilized. He packs the bark media tightly around the plant with the potting stick, so no rhizome clip is required.

Dave’s family has been growing orchids since 1925. His family’s nursery was concerned about viruses long before it became fashionable, and they were the first in their state to be certified virus free. He has one hundred years of orchid growing knowledge in his bloodline, so it is no surprise that he sees things that others might miss. I cannot wait for my next orchid growing lesson!

### **Covid Humour**

- Did you know that on average, a Panda bear feeds for about 12 hours a day, and sleeps the other 12, which is pretty close to what a human being does in Covid quarantine. Obviously, that’s why they call this a Pandemic.
- I told my suitcases there will be no holiday this year. Now I’m dealing with the emotional baggage.

## **“VIRUS PROLIFERA” by Jan Robinson** (republished with Jan’ permission)

As if our lives are not permeated enough right now with Covid19, another dreaded “V” has insidiously crept into my orchid collection. Where did it come from, some idiot removalist who knew his orchid had tested positive and he delivered it to me anyway? A limo driver who transported one of my flasks along with an infected international flight crew? Couldn’t have been that pet food delivery guy—we don’t have any pets!

At any rate, one of the few Pleuro’s in my collection had been looking a bit sus lately. Could even have been as early as last year that symptoms started to manifest, when I should have immediately declared a lock down and put my plant into strict quarantine. But I didn’t, opting to stick my head in the sand and hope that it was suffering from just a passing illness.

With no improvement noted this week, I thought it wise to consult with one of our Society’s resident Chief Orchid Medical Officers, Jim Brydie, and sent him some photos of my sus plant for a diagnosis. I had to wait less than 24 hours to get the results. Dr. Jim’s immediate response was, “Hmmm, does look suspicious” and then went on to say, “I am especially wary of infections that exhibit markings along the vein lines in leaves, although it doesn’t always mean virus.” My Pleuro definitely had spotting along the veins, which seemed to go all the way through the leaves. Oh no!

Could it just be black marks due to the cold weather, some sort of fungal infection? Maybe. Was it worth putting my plant in isolation in a warmer spot, cutting off the damaged leaves, and waiting to see if the new ones grow clean, as Dr. Jim suggested as a possible treatment? DEFINITELY NOT, since the only suitable “warmer spot” would be in my glasshouse and there is NO WAY that plant was going in there, possibly to transmit the virus to every orchid in residence!!

Dr. Jim’s prognosis was this: “The trouble with virus is that it is just educated guesswork without a laboratory test, and even then, they only test for a few of the more prevalent common types. There are many, many kinds of virus. Some are almost insignificant in their effect on the plant apart from a few spots.” His final advice? “I would chuck it in the bin on the basis it isn’t worth the experiment to find out if it is cold damage or virus.”

When the experts tell you to do something, then you should do it! Last rites were given and my *Pleuro prolifera* (which of course has never flowered as well as it did recently!) was bundled tightly up in a suitable plastic shroud—plant, potting mix, and pot all together—and unceremoniously jettisoned into the red bin. The red “contaminated materials only” bin, of course, not the green bin. Heaven forbid any infected plants get disposed of in the green bin, only to get chopped up into mulch by the Council and recycled back into our gardens!

R.I.P. *Pleuro prolifera*, I fervently hope you have not infected any of the rest of my collection! I can only trust that some bright spark out there is working feverishly to come up with a suitable and safe orchid vaccine. Bring on the roll out!!!

By Jan Robinson and, indirectly, Jim Brydie (thanks Jim!!)

**And a “PS” by Jim.** – I am a bit embarrassed by Jan’s lovely writing, but it did happen. Her cute little Pleuro looks highly suspicious and I am afraid I would have binned it at first sight, but I am a tad cautious about advice to others that might be a bit too strong. It doesn’t tend to achieve the desired result, and even if it is virus it is very hard to be sure just going by a picture. Whenever you are suspicious but not sure, it is best to first isolate the plant and treat any other possible causes like insects, cold damage, bacteria or fungi. However, in the end, the only real decision is whether all the isolation/rescue effort is worth it versus the risk to the rest of your collection. Especially if the poor plant is only worth about \$10 anyway. Such is life, action/effort versus cost and risk. **Pleur. rowlei** pic off the internet

And by the way Jan, I didn’t bother to correct the name at the time but a number of different Pleuro. species seem to sold widely under wrong names and I don’t think yours was *Pleur. prolifera*. I think it might have been *Pleur. rowlei* but I can’t blow up the picture enough to properly compare flower characteristics. Neither species is exactly rare or hard to find, and if you really liked this little cutie you can easily get another. Now, all go back and re-read Sue Bottom’s great article on the previous pages. It is full of great pictures of the kinds of virus symptoms to be on the lookout for and when to look. Very practical, useful knowledge.



## THE PLEASURES & PERILS OF PLEIONE By Melissa Karayannis (editor Sutherland OS., Sydney)



In the winter of 2019 I volunteered to suddenly take over the (then) modest orchid collection of my late Father-In-Law (Mark Karayannis) after he had suffered a major stroke. The genus I lost within the first 18 months was Pleione.

I had inherited a stack of plants and the only information I had was their tags. There were about 17 different genera, all with different wants and needs. Having previously grown tulips, I thought Pleione sounded like one of the easier challenges.

I read on the internet that they were bulb-like plants, cool to cold growers. I also read that I needed to keep them, unearthened, in the fridge over winter to keep them cold.

Then in July, I apparently needed to pot them in a bark, sphag and perlite mix, then wait for the joys of spring. I did this for two years and grew lovely leaves but no flowers, then, in the second year all the bulbs (about eight) died.

During my steep learning curve in the world of orchids, I have developed a love of a 'frilly lip' and the pictures of Pleione that I researched at that time, have stuck in my mind. That, connected with the sadness of losing a whole genus (even if it was only 8 'bulbs') from Mark's collection made me determined to 'keep an eye out' for Pleione in order to attempt them again.

In May 2021, whilst scrolling through Facebook, I noticed an advertisement for a 'sale on pleione' from Lawranna Orchids in Beechworth Victoria. I called them up and spoke to a lovely, down-to-earth lady, Anna Christesen. I told her my Pleione woes. When I asked her if I could grow them in temperate Sydney and that I've read they need to be in the fridge for winter, her answer was a fantastic 'bullshit'! And I thought 'awesome, I'm going to give them another go!'

Over a few phone calls and texts, Anna gave me the information I needed. Her sage advice (please note this is my interpretation of her advice, I hope it's correct) included:

1. Use a terrestrial finer orchid mix (not the same as an epiphytic mix...who knew!) and wet it through with half-strength 'Wetta Soil' (or the like) to ensure the mix doesn't become water resistant.
2. Pleione stay better insulated & hydrated in their pots over winter, not bare in the fridge.
3. In June-July (it was June this year), take the 'bulbs' when they start 'moving', from their old mix and repot. You can either cut off all the old roots and balance the 'bulb' on the top of the mix, or remove the root outer-casing and use those threads as anchors in the mix.
4. When repotting, place the old 'bulbs' against the pot edge and point the new 'pups' towards the centre to enable them to have more room to grow.
5. In June, keep them slightly dry, definitely not wet and increase the watering July-August when shoots emerge from the 'bulbs'.
6. The flower bud shoots have a rounded tip, new bulb shoots are pointier.
7. They will flower first, then shoot up leaves.
8. Increase fertilizer when in leaf (Spring/Summer), reduce in autumn (pull the old leaves off then). -- 9. Repeat next year!

Anna said Pleiones like semi-shade to full morning sun, especially in cooler months. She suggested I try some in different growing areas and see how they fair.

So, I purchased \$50 of Pleione bulbs and gave it a go! I grew some in a warm spot with morning (winter) sun and some in dappled light that resembled a cooler forest floor (yes, I wagered the forest floor would win). The Pleione in the sunnier area sprouted flowers at the same time as the cooler area. They didn't, however, have to 'find the sun' and thus their stems were very short, not allowing enough room for the relatively large flower to unfurl without interference. The flowers in the cooler area with lower light/dappled morning sun sprouted



glorious flowers on tallish stems, unmarked by any soil/pot skirmishes.

So (many thanks to Anna) I have now flowered Pleione. I have 'raised a glass' to my Father-in-law's memory and I have beheld so many lovely 'frilly lips'!

P.S. Yes there's a lot of pink colours here..... I'm collecting whites and yellows next!



*Postscript from Jim B. – A lovely story Melissa. I also learned the practicalities from scratch and had to call in the 'vet' a few times along the way. Sadly, I haven't paid the proper respects in recent years and now only have a couple of the toughest ones left, but your story charmed me and I too might start looking out for new ones. Those yellows are hard to find in Sydney but they are here. Most yellows stem from *Pl. forrestii* (left) which is a 'highish' elevation species and can be tricky here but the hybrids should be easier.*



*I thought I might add a couple of pictures from the internet of Pleione growing in habitat in the wild to show what kind of orchid they are. Sort of epiphytic, but very mossy, and sometimes terrestrial but in steep situations.*



**Distracted Driving Incident** This morning on the M3 I looked over to my left and there was a woman in a brand new Mercedes doing 70 mph with her face up next to her rear view mirror putting on her eyeliner.

I looked away for a couple seconds to continue shaving, and when I looked back, she was halfway over into my lane, still working on that makeup.

As a man, I don't scare easily, but she scared me so much, I had to put on my seat belt and I dropped my electric shaver in the process which knocked the doughnut out of my other hand. In all the confusion of trying to straighten out the car and catch things while using my knees to control the steering wheel, I knocked my mobile phone away from my ear and it fell into my coffee which was between my legs. Scalding hot coffee splashed everywhere and burned some very sensitive parts of my body. Landing in the coffee also ruined the damn phone, soaked my trousers, and disconnected an important call. --- Women drivers eh!