



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

(Established in 1947)

A.B.N. 92 531 295 125

11th December 2023 Volume 64 No. 12

Annual Membership : **\$15 single, \$18 family**

Patrons - Pauline and Trevor Onslow

President : Dennys Angove (Culture Class) 043 88 77 689

Secretary : Jenny Richardson

Treasurer : Lina Huang (and Sales Table)

Vice President : tba

Editor (Hon. volunteer) Jim Brydie

Society mail to - PO box 1501 Lane Cove, NSW, 1595

Committee Jessie Koh (Membership Secretary / Social Events)

Committee Herb Schoch (Community outreach, Sales Table)

Committee : *we are seeking new committee members,*

Committee : *please let us know if you might*

Committee : *be willing to join us*

web site (active link) : <http://kuringaiorchidsociety.org.au>

Society email : kuringaiorchidsociety@gmail.com

Next Meeting : Mon 11th December 2023 and 7.30 pm start **** one week and half an hour early**

Venue : The West Lindfield Community Hall, corner of Bradfield Rd and Moore Avenue, West Lindfield.

*Attendees must be at least double vaccinated for Covid. Please tick your name off the attendance list on arrival & enter 'DV' for double vaccinated if your status has not already been recorded. We expect a few non-member partners on our party night, please ask those accompanying you to complete the attendance list. Face Masks recommended.

Please, if you are feeling unwell - do not attend.

The hall is open from 6.00 pm. Please try and get there early to help set up tables and chairs. There is much to do for our Christmas party night. A few members regularly help in this way but more helpers will make the job much easier and quicker. There is a lot of truth in the saying 'many hands make light work'.

Don't forget, this is Christmas party night, special arrangements apply : (more detail on pages 2 & 3)

1. There is no Sales Table, Culture Class, or Guest Speaker.

2. The table set up for our party and monster raffle means that benching space will be limited. There will still be benching of orchids, but we ask you to **limit the number of plants you bench to THREE (per membership not per person).**

Please note that benching doesn't start until 7pm and there will only be 30 minutes for benching - benching must be completed before 7.30pm. Please fill in your cards at home, even *if you have to wait until you get there to add the benching class number, advance preparation does help.* Do your best to fill in benching cards correctly, there are laminated copies of the benching guidelines available at the hall to refer to, if you are still unsure just ask one of the experienced growers for guidance.

3. The actual **meeting commences early at 7.30pm. We want flowers all benched and you sitting down by then.**

4. The **FOOD – The Party** starts around 8pm. The **Society will be providing all the food and drinks, including dessert.** ONLY appointed helpers will be allowed in the kitchen. We ask members to NOT bring any food extras to share. If you have dietary requirements by all means bring what you need. Vegetarian options will be provided.

Drinks – the society will supply drinks, but members may bring their own tippie if they wish. Please note it is a condition of our hall hire that **no glass bottles** may be used on the Premises.

Cutlery and Plates - The society will have disposable cutlery and plates available but members are invited to bring their own for personal use if they wish. If you bring in something for your wine or other beverage, that is fine, but please, NO GLASS.

5. The **main entertainment feature of the night is our traditional Monster Christmas Raffle.** The Society has prepared two big Christmas hampers, and a few other prizes, but **members are all asked to also donate one or two presents as raffle prizes.**

There are no rules about what your donation may be but please, **no tricks, booby prizes or useless unwanted re-gifts.** Make it something nice, a prize you would be pleased to win yourself. Perhaps a value of around \$10 – 20. Examples might be an orchid, chocolates or other sweets, etc. If you are donating plants or orchids but they are smaller or of lesser value, perhaps box a few items together. Please wrap non-plant gifts, it adds to the anticipation.

6. The **Final Instruction** - This is a party night where we all get the chance to share our interest in orchids or anything else, in a friendly environment with partners and guests. Please come ready to enjoy the evening and maybe take the opportunity to get to know a few people you don't normally get the chance to chat to. Be bold, say hello.

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President Dennys' Desk – Thank you all for a great November meeting, we had 46 people attend which was fantastic. **David Floyd's** culture class was well received. We had some members who apologised for not being able to attend. I hope you are all managing ok and will get back to our meetings as soon as able. I also extend thanks to those members who contributed to the meeting by talking about how they grew their plants. We had lots of helpers, which was fantastic. November marks the end of our yearly benching competition. The benching scores are in, and preparations are underway to recognise the efforts of all members who benched during the year. For our new members, the benching competition restarts at our December Christmas party.

Christmas Party – There will be additional information on the Christmas Party elsewhere in this bulletin.

Last year our party was well received so we will be running our 2023 party in a similar way except we need to keep the total at 80, so members will need to register their intention to come by emailing KOS or ringing/SMS Dennys on 0438877689. If we reach 80 before you let us know you would like to come, we can put you on the wait list. The council has also placed constraints on the use of single-use plastic ware and glass bottles are not to be used during functions in the hall. We will be preparing food in the kitchen and serving it in the adjacent annex under more controlled conditions. Members will not be required to bring food since all the catering will be done by our society. It will make it easier if members can bring a self-picnic-set such as plates, cutlery and drinking vessels. We will be supplying some paper cups, paper plates as well as wooden cutlery. All the soft drinks and water provided will be largely in cans. Some light beer will be provided. Wine will be supplied in cask form. The Christmas raffle will still take the same form. The hall will be opening at 6.00 pm and some folk have already offered to help, which is great and can also be a bit of fun. At this time, I thank all those who have already contributed.

New Benching Cards – We are trialing a new benching card, (see adjacent image). The society's name has been reduced to **KOS**. The card is the same physical size as the former and we are still only using one side since it is too time consuming for data entry if both sides of the card are used, especially if entering data for 120 to 150 plants each month. All fonts have been increased in size. The **Class** line has been reduced in size since it only requires the class number which is located on yellow class cards located on the benches at each meeting. The **Genus** line is the same size, and the **Plant Name** line has been increased to two lines to accommodate long names, such as those used with hybrids. The **Exhibitor's Name** heading has been replaced with **Member(s)** and is still one line. The **red square** is for use by judges when they allocate 1st, 2nd or 3rd. The example given is for a hybrid orchid that Janine and I have submitted previously which was awarded 2nd place for its class.

Class: 15 KOS [2]
Genus: Colmanara
Plant Name: Wildcat
Bloodshot
Member(s): J & D Angove

Wearing masks – COVID is still around, I will no longer be wearing a mask at our meetings. However, please feel free to continue to wear a mask at our meetings and hand disinfectants will be available.

Member's welfare – personal challenges occur all the time, so please remember, if you need to speak to someone immediately then you are most welcome to contact me at any time, 24/7 on 043 88 77 689

Just to be sure, let's, recap on Arrangements for the 2023 Christmas meeting night :

(a) **Mon Dec 11th** is a week earlier than our normal meeting night to avoid family Christmas arrangements.

* **The hall opens early at 6 pm, please consider helping set up the tables and chairs if you are able**

* **The meeting also commences early at 7.30 pm. Benching is between 7 pm and 7.30 pm**

Please don't be late.

(b) **Table space is reduced due to the party arrangements and benching cannot start until 7 pm. YOU ONLY HAVE HALF AN HOUR to 'bench'.** We love to see all your beautiful orchids, but we ask members to only bench your best 3 plants, just for this month, we will return to full benching in January.

(c) **Prepare Early** - We want everyone to have a relaxed and happy evening. Please plan your arrival early and leave yourself enough time. Fill in your benching cards at home as best you can. **And Please** wear your name badge, it makes it so much easier to approach people you don't know all that well without getting stressed if you can't remember their name. Put your name tag in the car right now so you don't forget, **and wear it when you get there.**

(d) **Meeting Formalities** - There will be a brief "formal" part of the meeting from 7.30pm to announce the winners of this year's benching point score competition and the handing out of associated prizes. Our judges also need some time to judge the orchids benched on the night. We all know party fare beckons and we will get through this part of our meeting as quickly as possible.

(e) **The Monster Christmas Raffle** is the main event of the night. The Society supplies two big Christmas hampers that have been expertly prepared as always, by Ann Byron, plus a few other prizes. However, we depend on you to

make up the majority of the donated raffle prizes. The more the merrier.

Be generous, everyone likes to go home with an early Christmas pressie and it's the season to be kind to others and spread some joy. Make it a true Monster raffle, it's always fun to share the party spirit and watch as the gifts are distributed amongst those present. We suggest something worth around \$10 - \$20. Orchids are an obvious choice but don't forget we also have partners and guests so prizes don't have to be orchids. It could be books, chocolates, exotic plants. If you want to donate plants or orchids but they are smaller or of lesser value, perhaps box a few together.

Please though - no tricks, no plastic plants, no booby prizes. Make it something you would be pleased to win yourself. To reduce the "folding" task, tickets will be \$1 per ticket or \$5 per strip (of 6), a little different from our normal system.

(f) The Party food - The Society provides all the foods, including dessert, and a limited range of soft-drinks, beer and cask wine. **To minimise cross handling of foods, we ask that YOU DO NOT bring food contributions.**

If you have special dietary requirements and need to bring food or drink specific to meet your own needs, then by all means go ahead but please remember that the kitchen is off limits. There will be no facility for cooking or warming anything you bring. And please, NO REAL GLASS. Hall hire insists we use no actual glass.

(g) Plates, cups, and 'cutlery' - the society will supply some disposable plates and cutlery. However, members may bring their own for their own use if you wish. As normal we ask that you do bring your own mugs/cups for coffee or tea. Whatever such items you bring with you, must also take home with you at the end of the night.

(h) If you have not already confirmed, please let us know via the KOS email or text Dennys if you are attending.

Have fun, donate lots of raffle prizes, buy lots of raffle tickets, meet someone new and go home happy

Other News Items

1. Membership Fees – with all the other good news it seems incongruous to have to say this but needs must apply. Now is also the season to renew your annual membership fees. Current fees are \$15 single, \$18 family.

You can pay by bank transfer to **Westpac Bank, BSB No 032 188, account name - Ku-ring-gai Orchid Society Inc. and account number 103568**. If you use this method, please use your full name as the payment description or your phone number if your financial institution does not allow you to enter your name. If you wish, you can email kuringgaiorchidsociety@gmail.com to confirm your payment.

You can also pay Jessie Koh, our membership secretary, in person at a meeting by cash or a cheque made out to **Ku-ring-gai Orchid Society Inc** or alternately you can also post a cheque to KOS, PO Box 1501, Lane Cove, 1595.

2. Committee members & general helpers: As mentioned at our November meeting, with only 5 members in the committee we need some extra support to continue to be able to run our society. New committee members would be most welcome, but additionally, anyone can assist by helping out with various regular tasks. If you are willing to support your club in any capacity, please let one of the committee know, your help would be most appreciated.

Best of the Evening Novice – Miltoniopsis Hawaiian Swizzle 'Red Bull' – benched by Loretta & Paul Au



The Miltoniopsis 'pansy' orchids must be among the most beautiful of all in the family and what a wonderful specimen Loretta and Paul are showing us here. The flowers are big too – about 9 x 9cm. However, for those wishing to rush out and get one, I caution that most growers find Miltoniopsis a tad on the difficult side.

There are half a dozen species in this genus of the subtribe Oncidiinae. Some come from wet lower elevation altitudes, but most come from habitats a little higher. Enough to say that they all seem to like warm, moist climates that never get too cold or too hot and they don't suffer extremes of either very well. Well that's how I see it of course, but I have to admit that Loretta and Paul and at least half a dozen other of our members seem to have no trouble at all growing them. Surely it can't just be me can it?

Mr. President, I think it might be time to find a guest speaker or team (perhaps from our own ranks?) to give us a talk on how to actually grow these delicious looking orchids.

In my own collection I have never found quite the right spot for Miltoniopsis. My shadehouse is too cold in winter. Just as I am getting them going, the cold weather arrives and they go backwards at a rate of knots. My glasshouse has the winter warmth through heating, but in winter the Miltoniopsis find it too stuffy and in summer the glasshouse is too hot. If there really is a 'just right' spot at my place, I haven't found it yet.

Miltoniopsis come in a lovely range of colours. Not quite as broad as the Cattleyas, but impressive nonetheless, and they also have a spectacular variation in the patterning in the lip. Most are in the pinks, reds, and white, but there are other spectacular combinations being developed. Here are few examples with pictures from Orchidwiz.



Mltps. Jean Carlson



Mltps. Catalina de Alvarado



Mltps. Augres 'Trinity'



Andrea West 'WW West'



Hudson Bay 'Brenda'



Mltps. Ariel



Hoover & Dolly Willis

Wouldn't you just love to grow any one of those?

Congratulations on another Best of the Evening Loretta and Paul. You are obviously top class growers and we look forward to your helping the rest of us to drag along in your wake.

Best of the Evening Species –

Laelia (now Cattleya) purpurata var. schusteriana x var. carnea 'Ruby' grown by **Helen Wong**

Purpurata is an amazing species. A relatively tall, upright growing plant that looks tough and is tough. It comes in a huge range of colour variations and combinations, many of which are generally referred to as 'varieties' (abbrev. = var.) but that terminology is incorrect and they should be more correctly designated 'forms'. The taxonomists might put it more exactly as horticultural forms (abbrev. to h.f.).

So what is the difference between a variety and a form? Well for starters, I need to state that the terms 'variety' and 'form' can only apply to species orchids. In hybrids, all individuals among a group of the same parentage are designated 'cultivars' and any individual regarded good enough to distinguish it from others may be given a cultivar name such as the Miltoniopsis cultivar 'Red Bull' featured in the Best of the Evening Hybrid article above.



Now getting back to varieties and forms. A few years ago I thought a contributor to the Orchidboard.com community blog summed up the difference very nicely.

"Form" should be used for minor variations within a population - like the few white flowered plants among the usual pinks, often where both white and pink flowered forms are normal variation you might find among sibling plants. "Variety" should be a regional variant, a distinct population, with one or more distinct characteristics across all or most of that particular population. However, there may be cases that could be viewed either way.

However, the use of var. and f. have changed over time. Which is currently correct in any particular case depends on which was most recently validly published and generally accepted (whether that fits the current interpretation of not). Those that might be incorrectly defined often get corrected to the current standard when a review or revision of a group is published, but unless the correction has been formally published the original designation stands.

Now that makes it all perfectly clear doesn't it? Just for the moment I will call them 'varieties' despite my disagreement.

Having gotten all that out of the way, let's talk about *Laelia/Cattleya purpurata* as a species and this particular 'cultivar'. Helen's orchid is named as a cross between two varieties so let us look at each type.

Purpurata var *schusteriana* is described as the 'purple stained' *purpurata* because of the deeply purple coloured lip. Variety *carnea* is named for its very different rose coloured lip. The faint purple flares in Helen's plant are not a distinguishing feature of either variety but can be seen in some cultivars of var *schusteriana* and other varieties like *Roxo-Violeta* and *Striata*. Where the flares are a particularly prominent feature, it might be called variety *Flamea*.

Helen's orchid has slightly different colour to the lip than either parent variety and its colour is likely a result of the mixing of the reddish/pink tones of *carnea* and the deep purple of *schusteriana*. The pictures below contrast the colour differences.



Lip of var. carnea



lips of two cultivars of var. schusteriana



lip of Helen's purpurata

Now, as to the info about *Cattleya purpurata* as a species. As you might imagine, *purpurata* has been judged Best of the Evening at our meetings quite a few times before so I am not going to try and give you chapter and verse all over again but instead I will select appropriate bits from past write ups and hope you don't remember it all before you start.

Cattleya purpurata is a native of only southern Brazil, it occurs in a relatively coastal-strip, extending from just above the border with Uruguay, north to Santos which is about latitude 24, well south of Rio. This is a strip about 1000 km long. Within its native coastal zone, *purpurata* is most common in tall trees in heavy forest along small creeks, usually below 180m elevation.

However, in writing this month's bulletin I became aware that I had made bad errors in past articles where I tried to equate this Brazilian latitude range to the equivalent latitudes of east coast Australia.

I can now confirm that the Brazilian latitude range equates in Australia to somewhere around Rockhampton in Qld to Sydney in NSW. I apologise for past errors.

So what do we make of all that? –

1. Its zone doesn't extend up into the tropics so it is not a 'tropical' warm growing orchid.
2. It is pretty much strictly coastal, but what might be the significance of that? Well for one thing, in coastal areas the max/min temperature variations are less extreme and rainfall patterns are less seasonal. Drier inland areas often tend to have very seasonal rainfall with distinct wet season and dry seasons. In *purpurata*'s zone, the monthly rainfall varies only from a monthly low of about 80 mm to a high of 130 mm so it gets some water all year round without a massive rainfall in any one month.

Our Sydney climate isn't quite as kind, but can you see why it grows so well here. The suggestion would be in a shadehouse under 50% shade and water and feed regularly all year. However, as with all epiphytes, don't overdo it, and back off in the cooler weather where drying is slower and so is growth.

A recent study of mobile phone communications came up with the following statistics on average call times

Boy to boy – 26 seconds

Boy to Mum – 31 seconds

Boy to Dad – 15 seconds

Husband to Wife – 2 seconds

Boy to Girl – 2 hours, 16 minutes, 59 seconds Girl to Girl – 5 hours, 31 minutes, 59 seconds

Mum to Married Daughter – 10 hours, 35 minutes, 59 seconds

Wife to Husband – 47 Missed Calls

Best of the Evening Hybrid – Vandachostylis Alice’s Anie – benched by Lesley & Garrie Bromley



I wasn't there at this meeting so I have only seen pictures of Alice's Anie but it sure looks a beauty. The colour looks like one of those flowers that is very hard to capture. The lolly pink colour always seems to look like it has too much luminance, especially against a black background, but what a cutie.



Alice's Anie was registered in 2004 by Alice's Orchids in Qld. The parents are Vanda Apinantat made by T Orchids in Thailand, and the species *Rhynchostylis coelestis*.

There are no pictures of Apinantat available but it was a cross between the famous old hybrid Vanda (or Ascocenda) Meda Arnold and a large flowered bluish purple Vanda called Nok. Meda Arnold had 5cm flowers in a wide range of colours including pink, red, orange and blue.

The species *Rhynchostylis coelestis* on the other hand has always been a favourite with me. It

only has small (2 – 3 cm) flowers but they are blue and white there are 50 of them packed tightly together on an upright 20-30 cm inflorescence. I think this is one of the prettiest of all orchids. (*see below*)

Rhynchostylis coelestis has been hybridised with all sorts of Vandaceous orchids, sometime successfully sometimes not so successful, but the best ones are really good. Once of the most popular was Vandachostylis Pine Rivers which has received nearly 50 awards among 34 separate cultivars. Perhaps its one factor that might be criticised is that its hybrids flowers tend to be smallish at around 4 cm diameter but when you get lots of them I think that compensates.

Alice's Anie is still rather new and only has one cultivar awarded so far. Perhaps there are others on the horizon.

Congratulations on another Best of the Evening Garrie and Leslie. It looks beautiful.

Rhynchostylis coelestis 'HB Blue Lip'



A Bulletin Guest Speakers Section?

I am not sure how sustainable this will prove to be but from now on I am going to try to always include an article or perhaps even just 'thoughts of wisdom' from other growers.

Initially, it will probably be previously published articles from other newsletters or from the internet (as I have been doing regularly anyway) but what I would like to encourage is shorter pieces about something you noticed or a lesson learnt, from growers who have been experimenting or even perhaps accidentally noticed an improvement after making some change or other. A sort of "sharing of wisdom space".

The previously published articles bit isn't new, but please can some of you other members or non member readers please also contribute by sharing your process of growing knowledge or understanding about orchid growing?

I know that many experienced growers shudder at the thought of writing – a factor that I have tried hard to combat for many years with little success. However, I can assure you all that like most skills we learn as individuals, the first step is by far the biggest and it is never anywhere near as big as your mind tells you it is.

If you are still scared off, look at the various editions of Cary's Ramble that I have republished from the Manly Warringah club's newsletter. You don't need to write a novel. Just tell us what you are experiencing. And, if you need some help polishing it up, I offer my services. I have become quite good at fiddling with words in my years as editor.

Now, getting back to today's articles.

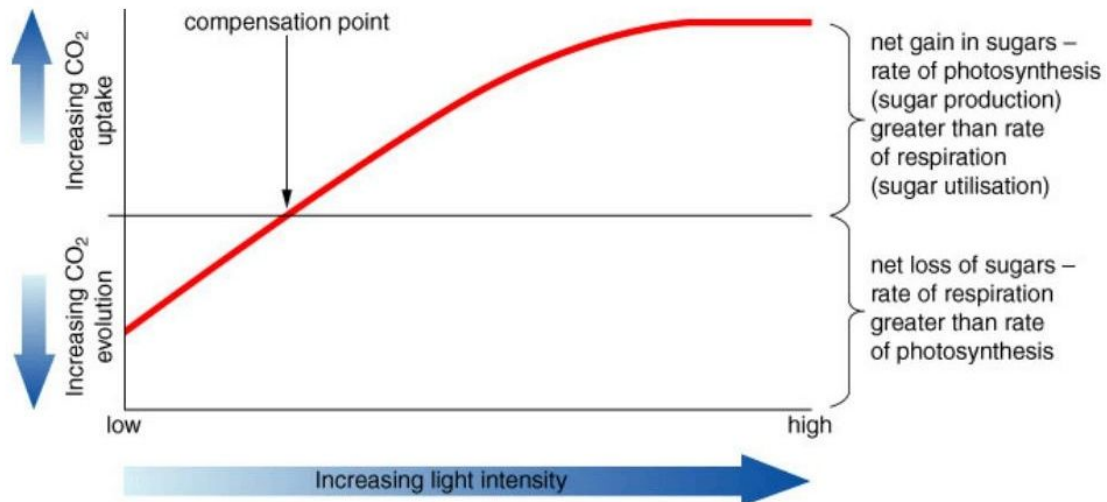
1. The following article by Sue Bottom offers a scientific yet practical way to understand the role light plays in plant growth. Light is not a one size fits all issue and it is so important to get the amount of light you offer as close as possible to what the orchid is looking for. Like all of Sue's articles, this is worth understanding.
2. The second article by Gerry Walsh gives an excellent insight into an Australian indigenous orchid that we don't see on benches because it is not widely cultivated. For explorers of our local bushland, *S. australis* is one you might find in the right places in many parts of the Sydney. I have seen it growing in gullies near Hornsby.

Fun Facts about Light -- by Sue Bottom (St Augustine Orchid Society, Florida)

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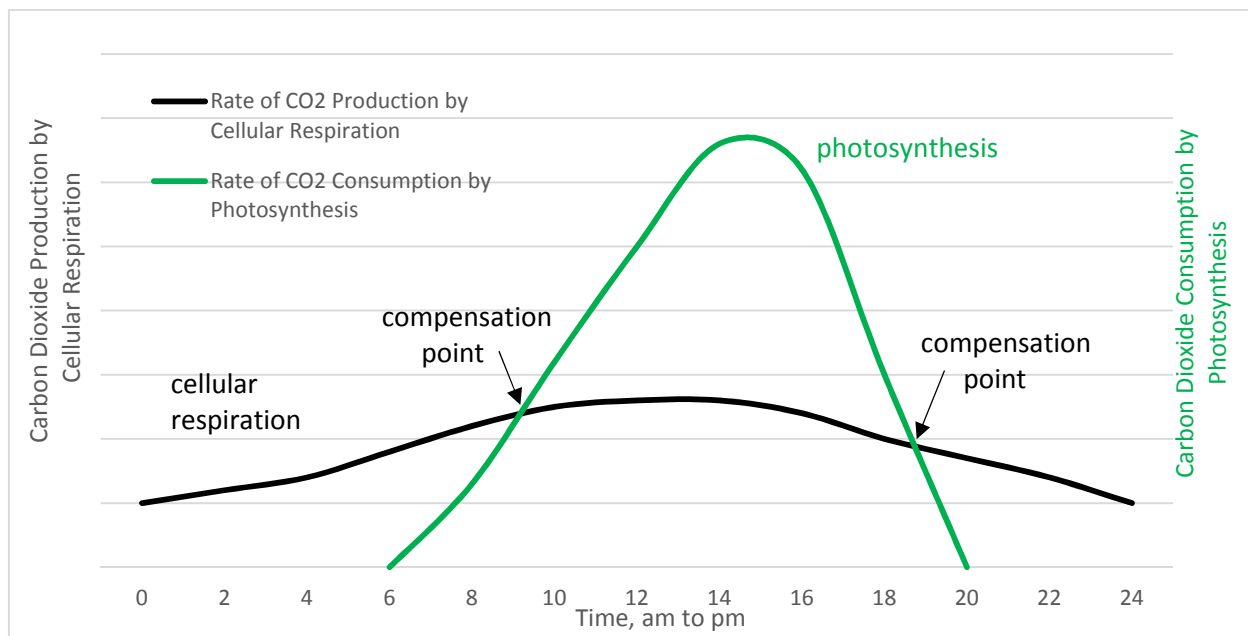
Republished with the permission of Sue Bottom and the St. Augustine Orchid Society

Photosynthesis is the process that drives the growth of plants. Carbon dioxide is absorbed from the air and chloroplasts absorb sunlight. The energy from light is changed into chemical energy by converting carbon dioxide into sugars, releasing oxygen back into the air. These sugars can then be used in the respiration process in which sugars react with oxygen to fuel plant growth and maintenance processes. When sugars are produced by photosynthesis in excess of what is needed for growth and respiration, they can be stored as starch for future use.

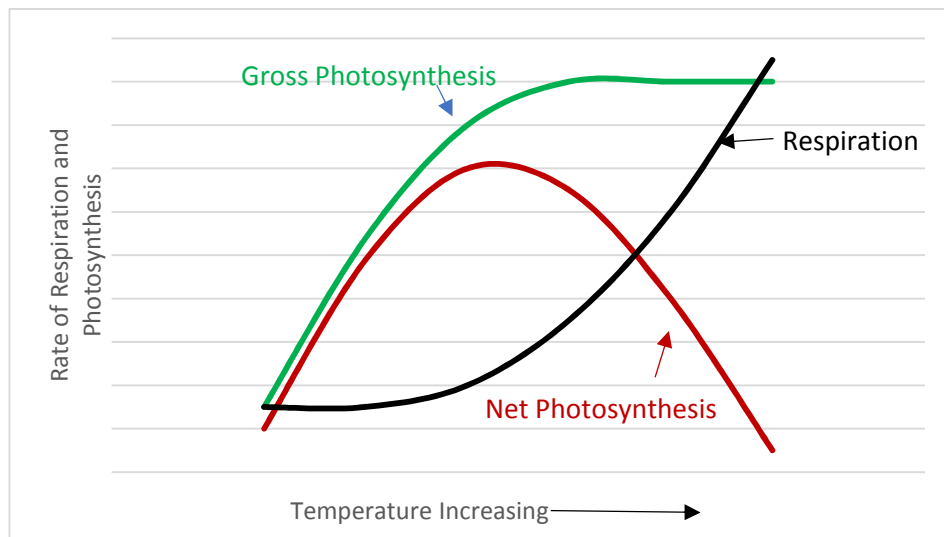


(Chart source artofbonsai.com, accessed 6/21/23, link: <https://www.artofbonsai.org/the-importance-of-light-intensity-in-photosynthesis/>)

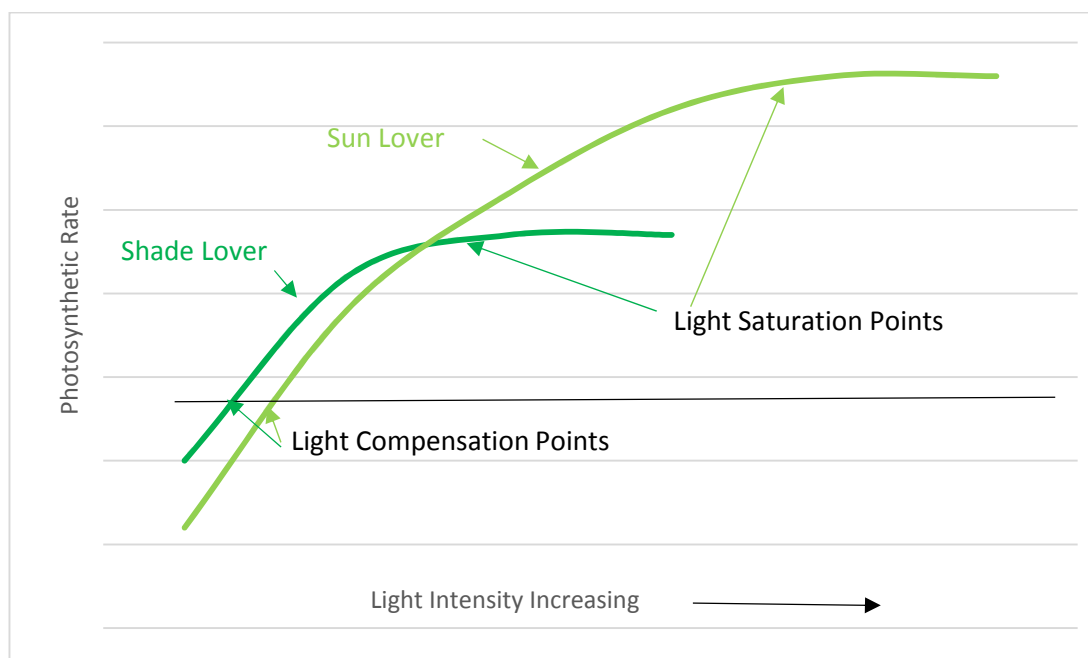
The compensation point is the amount of light required for a plant to produce enough energy through photosynthesis to cover the amount of energy required to grow and maintain cellular function through respiration. If there is not enough light, the plant will be stunted and not grow well. This sometimes happens to indoor plants that are grown under low light levels.



Photosynthesis occurs during daylight hours, while respiration occurs around the clock, during periods of light and periods of darkness. For plants to store up enough energy to bloom, the total amount of energy produced by photosynthesis has to be greater than the total amount of energy consumed by respiration.



Photosynthesis and respiration are both temperature dependent, and both processes initially increase in rate as the temperature increases. At a certain temperature, the photosynthesis rate becomes capacity limited and will increase no further while the respiration rate has no similar temperature limitation. This is one of the difficulties in growing plants in the heat of the summer. Additional shading added in the summer keeps the plants cooler, so they don't burn all the sugar that is produced, leaving some in reserve for flower production. This chart also illustrates why plants enjoy a drop in nighttime temperature. The lower nighttime temperature reduces the respiration rate so energy stores are not exhausted.



Each plant has a maximum light saturation point, the maximum amount of light that it can absorb and convert into chemical energy. If it is exposed to higher levels of light, it will absorb the energy of the light without being able to process it, so the internal leaf temperature will increase to potentially unsafe levels, possibly becoming sunburned.

Many orchid books give recommendations for maximum light levels in foot-candles, a measure of light visible to the human eye. A more meaningful measurement to plants is the light intensity of photosynthetically active radiation (PAR). The Photosynthetic Photon Flux Density (PPFD) value is measured in the barely comprehensible units of micromoles per square meter per second ($\mu\text{mol}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$). For sunlight, you can estimate the PAR by dividing the amount of light measured in foot-candles by 5. If the orchid books recommend 3,000 foot-candles for your cattleyas, it is comparable to PPFD value of $600 \mu\text{mol}/\text{m}^2/\text{sec}$. Artificial lighting has different conversion factors depending on its light spectrum. More and more you see lighting recommendations based on the PAR value. We might as well get used to it!

Sarcochilus Australis - by Gerry Walsh (the RocklilyMan)

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The first thing anyone should say about *Sarcochilus australis* is that this is one very beautiful Australian native species. It is not “one of your botanicals” as the expression goes. The second obvious point is that *S. australis* is notoriously difficult to maintain in captivity. It’s reputation for going belly-up is legendary.

But I believe it is no more of a problem to cultivate than most other ‘twig epiphytes’, in particular, other members of the *Sarcochilus* genus. There are other members of this genus that I can slaughter with equal panache; *S. spathulatus* and *S. dilatatus* are the most likely contenders for the title. And I can throw *S. serrulatus* and *S. parviflorus* into the ring with those as well. My longevity record with *S. australis* is six years. And I must confess that I doubt the others I’ve mentioned have lasted that long – I don’t really know for sure.

It’s just that *S. australis* has the reputation and so it’s the one I’ve watched. There are reasons for this dastardly reputation though. The main thing to remember is that *S. australis* is a very common orchid. The other four I’ve mentioned are much less encountered in the wild with the exception of *S. spathulatus*, which can be locally abundant – but still not as common as *S. australis*.



Enthusiasts frequently find dozens of plants lying about the floor of a suitable gully. Most cart them off home rather than let them perish wastefully. But inevitably the rescued plants will succumb, so it appears to the hapless grower that so many plants have slipped over the brink into oblivion. The conclusion? “This cursed *S. australis* must be impossible to grow!” I guess it is ... but no more so than many of its kin. That’s my theory, anyway.

S. australis is distributed from the Hunter River in Central NSW, southwards into Victoria and across the Bass Strait into Tasmania. Isolated plants have been found up as far as the Qld border but it can be considered to be ‘rare’ north of the Hunter. This river separates the vast Central NSW sandstone belt from the rest of NSW. From the moment you cross south over the Hunter into the sandstone country you are likely to see colonies of *S. australis* anywhere.

With a few notable exceptions, it continues along southward into Victoria sticking more or less to the eastern coast. The most baffling exception is in the Illawarra. I’ve scratched my head for many years over this enigma. And driven

others mad with the inevitable question: “Have you ever seen a single plant of *S. australis* on the escarpment between the Royal National Park and the Shoalhaven River?” This encompasses a distance of over a hundred kms of awesome native orchid country.

You can find nearly every other epiphytic species that is known to occur south of the Hunter in the Illawarra but no one I’ve discussed the problem with would swear to ever having seen a definite plant of *S. australis* on the coastal ranges. In the gorge country around Campbelltown, a major south-western suburb of Sydney, *S. australis* can be quite common. And it probably occurs in the vast stretches of Water Board catchment high up behind the coastal ranges.

Once you travel down towards Ulladulla and Bateman’s Bay it makes a huge comeback. The escarpment supports some of the finest stands of rainforest in NSW, along with vast sandstone cliff lines that give birth to numerous creeks and gullies. The majority seem indistinguishable from spots just an hours’ drive away which are simply infested with *S. australis*.

Down in my home town of Kangaroo Valley, I’ve spent most of my life slipping and sliding around leaping creeks, dank gullies and mossy cliffs. (My father once declared that I would surely turn into an eel if I didn’t return to the sunlight). But that sort of country is in my soul and as a result I’ve seen some incredible sights in my native orchid life. But I’m yet to see a single plant of *S. australis* in home territory. Why?

It is certainly not uncommon in north eastern Gippsland. On a visit to this region in July 1996, I saw numerous plants, mostly near to sea level, but some at mid altitudes as well. The general environment was certainly similar to *S. australis* habitat in the Blue Mountains. It is also found in the Otway Ranges, well to the west of Melbourne. I investigated a couple of likely spots but found nothing. A few miles further along I noticed odd plants hanging from trees beside the main road – usually as we crossed through damp gullies. At another point on a damp ridge top there was one of the largest specimens of *S. australis* I’ve ever seen – hanging by one root just three metres from the road.

I have been over to Tasmania only once and only for two days. Unfortunately I didn’t see any *S. australis*. However, I

believe it is common about the East coast so long as you are in just the right spot. Thereby lays the secret of finding *S. australis* in the wild. You must be in the right spot.

I have been told that it can be seen if you do a cruise on the Gordon River over on the west coast as well. Apparently it grows on the twigs of trees overhanging the water. What elements does this magic spot possess? I doubt that any person could give a blanket answer to this vexing question . . . but I'll have a crack at telling you.

If you are searching the great sandstone regions around Sydney, such as the Blue Mts or the Kuringai area, your colony is 90% certain to have set up home on either *Backhousia myrtifolia* (common myrtle) or *Tristaniopsis laurina* (water gum). Virtually every gully in this vast system is choked with one or both of these species. If you are seeing plenty of *Plectorrhiza tridentata* and *Sarcophilus hillii* on these same tree species, then you're in with a chance of finding *S. australis* among them.

On the myrtles you'll no doubt be seeing a good few specimens of *Dendrobium aemulum* as well. Water gums right in or lining the banks of creeks do often hold huge colonies of *S. australis*. But I believe myrtle to be a much more common host tree. They won't necessarily be hanging over running water either. You could be just on that fringe line between cool myrtle gully and dry sclerophyll type bush beside it. Such gullies usually only require two or three steps for a searcher to pass from one environment into the other. Another species that commonly holds good numbers of *S. australis* is a kind of rambling, prickly shrub that often lines dry, grassy gullies in steep country, and of which I have no idea what its real identity could be but it may be Blackthorn. It has thorns around 1 cm long and virtually always has dry moss and that old man's beard moss all through its messy branches, and particularly on the match thick twigs.

But *S. australis* does occur sparingly on a wide variety of other hosts within the major environments discussed. Under a canopy of Coachwood rainforest, or other typically rainforest type tree species you may find plants on the twigs that fall from high up in the canopy. *S. australis* is a common orchid, but don't be deluded, you could expire from old age while searching out your first colony! I cannot think of another species that sets up private enclaves quite as selectively as *S. australis* does. It's an absolute snob.

While stumbling about a likely gully, you may not see a single specimen of *S. australis*. Within metres you could be staring dumb-stricken at hundreds of plants. And while you're doing a Cherokee rain-dance at your long overdue success, you may take a couple of steps too far and lose sight of the lot in the blink of an eye.

I don't think I've ever seen a colony that extended beyond fifty metres or so along a creek. To the eye, conditions appear to be identical within and out of the colony. Another hundred metres away you could very likely walk into another big colony. Or you may not see any more for the rest of the day.

No doubt you'll be seeing plenty of other native orchids along the way. While some colonies can be measured by the hundreds of plants, most seem to consist of just a few dozen specimens. I doubt there could be any other reason for this quirky selectiveness other than the presence of a suitable fungus for seed germination.

As I stated before, *S. australis* is a 'twig dweller'. It mostly seeks out little branches and even vines that are thinner than a broom stick. Plants are often seen on wood no thicker than a match. Their roots will travel for over a metre along such thin twigs and when several roots join up and travel together the host twig is often camouflaged.

S. australis will fairly often attach itself to much thicker trunks and branches up to 15 cms wide. And when it does so, this species can grow into quite a substantial size. I have seen single lead plants 25 cms across with a dozen leaves up to 13 cms long and 2 cms wide. But I stress that this is exceptional.

An average plant of *S. australis* would only have three or four leaves of perhaps 5 to 8 cms length. The majority of plants in a colony would be much smaller than the average however. For *S. australis* appears to be a very fertile species that produces lots of offspring. Young plants flower at amazingly small sizes – 20 cent piece size.



pics above from - disjunctnaturalists.com

Racemes on such tiny plants rarely support more than 2 flowers however. *S. australis* has even been known to flower while still in the flask. Average raceme length is non-existent with *S. australis*. Anything is possible right to the upper limit of 22 cms or 9 inches. This may sound outlandish to novice growers but it is true.

Last November I was amongst hundreds of flowering plants in the Megalong Valley. Some racemes were around 18 cm long, many were over 12 cm while others got randomly smaller until seedlings only sprouted the single flower.

Nothing seemed to be an average at all. *S. australis* will kieki only infrequently but when it does it can throw up a dozen or so racemes. Single lead plants often have two racemes on board even smallish plants. Flowers are quite

variable. Some are up to an inch deep while others may be half this. Some are squat and nearly wider than deep. Colour is a lottery. The two basic background colours of the segments are bright but light green, and light brown/tan. The large labellum is usually snow white with red striations on the side lobes and a deep purplish spot on the mid lobe. Sometimes there is also a purplish spot on each side lobe. In the Blue Mts, plants are flowering at their best from November right up to Christmas.

So now you want to know how to grow this delightful species I guess? Well don't look at me too hard. The plant that lasted six years for me was tied onto a strip of iron bark totem and the roots eventually reached around 30 cms long. Like all the Sarcis that drop dead with SSDS (Sudden Sarc Death Syndrome) it all relates back to the crown. That's where they die. I don't think there is a cure or a preventative.

I've also had success for up to three years by attaching smallish plants to thin lengths of bamboo with a few strands of epiphytic moss hanging loosely over them. The roots romp away over the shiny surface and attach very well. But the crown will one day rot out. This seems like a good time to sprout off a bit of philosophy on conservation and the ethics of taking plants out of the bush etc.

S. australis is not programmed to last long. In the wild it germinates in great abundance, it grows roots from the protocorm with surprising speed and flowers from tiny plants. It does this because it mostly germinates on thin twigs that often die and fall to the ground in short time – with the orchid on board. Life is designed to be short for *S. australis* and it lives life to the full and generally dies young.

Unless you've explored a large colony and seen the high number of plants that lie on the ground or are already dead from doing so, you probably won't go along with what I'm preaching. But I see no harm in picking up these plants and having a go at extending their life. If plants have seed pods on board, and they often do, I prop them back up in a suitable limb so that seed dispersal will proceed at least one more time in the orchid's life.

With this approach I only refer to those twig epiphytes that are doomed. Don't be an idiot and take secure plants. The little ones inevitably establish quicker and last longer than the big specimens do anyway. Be happy with windfall plants and let the rest live on. You'll feel very satisfied with your self-control once you get the evacuees up and growing, either in yours or in a friend's bush house.

I believe that native orchids, the epiphytes at least, and in NSW at any rate, are probably in very good shape conservation wise. Think about it, forty years ago there were nurseries all over the place selling them. Particularly around the North Coast and the Mid North Coast. Just in Sydney there were three large nursery outlets that advertised native orchids extensively. You could buy just about any species you wanted.

You can't do that nowadays. In 1983, rainforest logging was stopped in NSW. This virtually dried up the supply in short time. You still see odd species for sale here and there – especially in the big chain stores. Qld was supposedly the source of all the plants. It does seem like that state was way behind the rest.

Things aren't like they were in the bad old days of the seventies and early eighties. Back then all the orchid society members mainly grew bush collected species. And the government gave licenses to nearly anyone who wanted to get in on the act. Today in a native society like ANOS Sydney Group, there probably wouldn't be more than ten members who still go out to the bush to see orchids in situ. Everyone grows species from flasks and now our benches are festooned with many hybrids at shows and meetings. This is a good thing.

You can't tell me that there is anything like the vast numbers of orchids coming out of the wild today that there was just that short time ago. But still some people beat their drums and rattle their swords when they hear of someone going bush for a few days. There is an automatic assumption that people like myself are intent on sweeping through the back blocks like a swarm of plague locusts. It just ain't like that dear reader.

I have digressed far enough. Back to the real world. Just be honest and conserve our native orchids because, like I've said before, they don't grow on trees . . .

One liners

- Be decisive. Right or wrong, make a decision. The road is paved with flat squirrels who couldn't make a decision.
- When I get a headache I take two aspirin and keep away from children, just like the bottle says.
- Message on phone system "Your call is very important to us. Please enjoy this 40-minute flute solo".
- Tip for a successful marriage: Don't ask your wife when dinner will be ready while she's still mowing the lawn.
- I hate it when I can't figure out how to operate the iPad, and my tech support guy is asleep. He's 5 and it's past his bedtime. (Today's 3-year-olds can switch on laptops and open their favorite apps. When I was 3, I ate mud)
- Scientists recently studied the effects of alcohol on a person's walk. The results were staggering.
- Father and son compulsively lit fires so the son asked "Dad, are we pyromanians?" Dad answered "yes we arson".