

## TOPIC: "ORCHIDS"

GUEST SPEAKER : STEVE FLOOD

MALENY GARDEN CLUB MEETING : 26 SEPTEMBER, 2017 UNDER THE OLD WITTA SCHOOL

Steve claims not to be an expert on orchids – he just loves them to the extent that they have taken over 150<sup>2</sup>m in the shade house and now number 1000 plants. His wife Julie also loves them and he says he can't go wrong if he buys her a new variety

- Orchids are an extremely large family of flowering plants surpassed in number only by the daisy family
- Orchids are found in every possible eco system around the world except Antarctica
- There are 880 genres e.g. Cymbidiums number 35,000 species but new ones are being discovered all the time – CSIRO personnel explored the Iron Range in Cape York and discovered a new orchid every 20 minutes
- Vegetation clearing globally causes loss of plants before they are identified and studied
- Majority of orchids are epiphytes growing in trees followed by lipophytes growing on rocks
- Saprophytic orchids live underground feeding on rotting roots of trees throughout Australia - flowers pop up above ground but with land clearing plants are killed and don't regrow
- Epiphytic orchid roots absorb moisture and nutrients from air. Most people like to grow orchids in pots but they will grow happily on a board or tree trunk
- Critical element of orchid potting mix is 25% air space. Steve uses composted bark from New Zealand (\$30 for 40L bag) which allows him to leave plant in pot for longer time – mix with jumbo Perlite and coir chips and Plantacote 6 months slow release fertiliser
- Some growers use a weak solution of liquid fertiliser with every watering
- In Nature most orchids propagate by seed which is like dust and very tricky to do in nursery. Tissue culture is also used in laboratories and sold in glass jars
- Cattleya orchids can take 7 years to flower. Psuedobulbs, which are the thickened stems at the plant's base used for water storage, can be divided to propagate new plants
- Soft cane Dendrobiums will propagate from old cane – lay horizontally in a tray of peat moss and it will send up new shoots
- Some orchids produce keikis (kay-kees) which can be carefully removed from the stem and propagated as a clone of the mother plant. Others which have a widespread base can be sectioned
- Vandas are monopodial and grow straight up – can only be grown from seed or tissue culture. Other orchid grouping is sympodial
- Orchids don't have a lot of pests or diseases but the dendrobium beetle will eat its buds and leaves and will also eat other orchids. Beetle is small with a very hard shell so poisons won't penetrate. If plant is shaken beetles will fall to ground but are too small to find. Best to place container of cooking oil below plant for beetles to drop into and perish
- Nepenthes – tropical pitcher plants or monkey cups – a genus of carnivorous plants - Steve has educated his to eat these beetles. Tip out residue from pitchers/cups – smelly water and beetle skeletons
- Root rot turns orchid roots to mush – caused by poor drainage or too much water. Cut off rotted roots and wash remainder in weak solution of anti-bacterial Condy's Crystals

- Native Swamp Orchid sheds its leaves when finished flowering. Has been critically endangered in the wild for 25 years through swamp reclamation and land clearing but is now protected. A special area has been created in the Maroochy Botanic Gardens to feature them
- Cymbidiums are tough but virus can attack. Tropical varieties flower well at Steve's place in Mooloolah Valley – temperate varieties better suited to Maleny. Cymbidium Midnight – is a native cross and favourite of Steves
- Cattleyas are easy to grow and don't require much attention – good on trees
- There are 1.5 million hybrid cattleyas around the world. Miniature cattleyas are now being developed to allow more variety for smaller gardens
- Oncidium 'Dancing Lady' is easy to grow
- Soft Cane Dendrobiums come in a variety of colours with different flowering times
- Vanilla Bean Orchid has either plain green or green and cream leaves. It is easy to pollinate with a toothpick as there is no insect in Australia to do the job
- When choosing a tree for attaching an orchid avoid those that shed their bark. Ideal trees are Callistemon, Casuarina, Traveller and Fan Palms to name a few
- One species of Dendrochilum Orchid looks like a tuft of grass which has microscopic and heavily perfumed flowers
- Seacol at 20% of recommended rate and similarly liquid potash are widely used for orchids

**CONTACT : Steve Flood, 9 Riverview Court, Mooloolah Valley Qld 4553. PHONE : 07 5492 9427**

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