

Dates and Schedules

Much of the information shown in this section was extracted from "Florida Orchid Growing Month by Month" by Martin Motes [12], and repeated in the TOS monthly flyers.

General

Use 10-10-10 during active growing season [7].

Use 10-30-10 four times a year [7].

Don't fertilize in winter or when temp > 85 [7].

January

[12]

Water judiciously, but early in the day.

Run plants on the dry side to preserve the possibility of using water for cold protection.

Check irrigation system in anticipation of cold.

Flush excess fertilizer salts from Cattleyas and other Simpodials.

Spray for mites, then spray again in 7-10 days.

[15]

In south Florida, Vandas thrive if days are stimulated to both root and bloom by the swing of day to night temperatures. A warm, and somewhat wetter than average season, may break some but not all sympodials into growth. These can be fed and watered, adding an extra bulb to their mass. Most of these will be reluctant to bloom, but may bloom all the more profusely next year. Those that have not commenced growth should be encouraged to remain dormant by withholding all food and water and given as bright of light as possible, short of burning them.

February [16]

Spread snail bait lightly. Spread again lightly in two weeks.

Spray for Botrytis using fungicides recommended for Florida, or bicarbonate of soda.

Begin spring potting.

Watch for mites.

Thrips start looming in the high 80's. Three or four warm days without rain will usually set them in motion. See "[Florida Orchid Growing](#)" for recommended control methods.

An application of vegetable or fish oil, 3 T per gallon, will suppress mites and also staunch scale crawlers. The oil will also eliminate thrips. Follow spraying in 7 to 10 days by regular liquid dishwashing soap at 4 T per gallon to finish off any mites or thrips.

Plants deficient in magnesium (Mg) should be sprayed with one T of Epsom Salts (MgS) per gallon of water on any plants whose foliage shows telltale reddening. Best applied in

conjunction with 1 T potassium nitrate (difficult to find now, but Broward Orchid Supply and [OFE](#) both carry it).

Vandas can be stimulated to both root and bloom due to the swing of day to night temperatures. They will need a little more food and water to get an early start on the growing season. Many other orchids normally dormant in February may break into growth early, so they too will need food and water.

Like Vandas, sympodials will be spurred into growth by a warm and somewhat wetter season. Feeding and watering should add an extra bulb to their mass. Most will be reluctant to bloom, but may bloom more profusely next year. Those that have not commenced growth should be encouraged to remain dormant by withholding all food and water, and given as bright a light as possible - short of burning them!

May

[18]

- Space plants properly for good air circulation
- Trim excessive foliage on trees and shrubs
- Repot Phalaenopsis out of sphagnum
- Finish repotting of various genera
- Reset vandaceous plants, remove keikies
- Water heavily early in month, more guardedly later
- Initiate preventive spray maintenance program

June

[12] [18]

- Careful watering this month often means no watering at all.
- Space plants amply. Good air circulation is essential across the coming months.
- Re-pot Phals and re-set Vandas. Make sure that plants are firmly set in their new abodes.
- Begin or continue a disease prevention program.
- Clean up growing area and plants. Remove dead leaves from plants and the ground. Pull weeds.
- Prune trees and shrubs to increase light and air circulation.
- Apply snail bait lightly early in the month and again lightly mid-month.

- Water only when truly necessary
- Give plants plenty of space to allow good air circulation
- Repot Phals and reset Vandas
- Begin or continue a disease prevention program
- Clean up growing area and pull weeds
- Apply snail bait lightly twice a month
- Enjoy living in the tropics!

[12]

April can provide an abundance of rain and cold fronts, just in time to greet the emerging growths of our orchids which were just breaking their dormancy. Fortunately the timing allows time for drying between the rains. Maintaining this pattern with heavy watering, alternating with hard drying, should be our goal for most of our sympodial orchids at this time. Make sure enough air is moving around the bases of the plants to allow the new growths to dry rapidly. A nascent rainy season can recur at any time, so an early start to the disease prevention program explicated in Florida Orchid Growing is advised. Now, if not done already, is the time to apply 6 month formula, low phosphorus time release fertilizer. The low phosphorus formula marketed as Dynamite and labeled for "Citrus" is available at Lowe's in a six month form. Our Vandas have also been enjoying the moist warm air. Give them plenty of water and on the hottest driest days they will enjoy a second watering mid afternoon and still be dry by evening. With such frequent watering, fertilizer can be substituted for water every 5-6 days. This will get them growing strongly into the rainy season.

[12]

What a perfect May! The cooler and much drier weather of this May has suited our orchids to perfection. All of our sympodial orchids are off to an excellent start, their new growths unhampered by any disease problems. The cooler than average temperatures have made for wider than normal swings of day to night temperatures stimulating both roots and flowers in our Vandas. In hindsight, we should have had a slightly heavier hand on the watering. Any plants showing symptoms of dehydration at this stage should be watered very heavily at each application. The drought of May will yield long term benefit to our orchids as the inevitable build up of disease pressure has been delayed for a full month. It is not too late to begin the disease control spray schedule set forth in Florida Orchid Growing, pg. 168. The cooler temperatures of this May slowed somewhat the progress of our perpetual foes mites and thrips but lacking the rain to wash most of them away, they need to be dealt with. Remember: do not use oil sprays in hot weather and soap should not be applied to dehydrated plants. Use with care, the chemical controls recommended by Florida State set forth in Florida Orchid Growing. Snails have been stopped in their tracks by the drought but are waiting to take up where they left off with the first heavy rains. A light application of snail bait after the rain will keep them at bay. The gentle easing into summer of this May reminds us again that Florida summer while long is not nearly as hot as most of the continent. Set the thermostat at 78 and enjoy one of the finest climates in the world. Spend more time with your orchids and share their joy in the great weather.

July

- Dry plants hard once or twice
- Apply liquid fertilizer instead of water during dry patches
- Watch for Thrips when rain has been sparse for several days
- Finish top cutting and planting of vandaceous general

[--]

June has been much cooler and exceptionally dry this year. The late advent of the rainy season has allowed our orchids to get off to an excellent start free from disease pressure. The drier air has also produced much wider swings in day to night temperatures which have stimulated exceptional rooting and prolific production of flower spikes in our vandas. All in all, growing conditions have been nearly perfect. Observant growers will have realized that the extraordinarily dry June weather has necessitated more frequent and heavier watering. Even now with the rainy season on a firmer footing, some plants showing symptoms of dehydration may need additional watering. July is typically drier than June but little in the weather has been typical this year.

Despite all the positive benefits that the exceptionally dry weather has conferred, it has brought an unexpected problem as well: mites. The heavy frequent rains of a typical June normally do a good job of washing mites from our plants. This year's drought has afforded mites a unique opportunity. Coupled with the lack of cleansing rain have come the higher temperatures which allow mites to reproduce at their fast rates. Growers should scout for mites and their tell tale damage and take immediate action to control them as outlined in Florida Orchid Growing, pg.169-171. Conditions were ripe for mites this June, so extra vigilance for them will be required during drier patches in July and August.

August

[20]

- Finish cutting teretes and reed stem Epidendrums early in month.
- Reset strap leaf vandas early or not at all.
- Dry hard once or twice.
- Continue anti fungal spray program.
- Apply snail bait lightly, twice, ten days apart.

Be sure trees are properly prune to withstand storms.

Should July turn out to be drier than usual, this can be good for our orchids, reducing diseases. Greater ability to choose when our orchids receive water is to be prized midway in the rainy season. Use this advantage wisely, watering early in the day, and only when needed. As days shorten dramatically in August, there is less time for our plants to dry during the day. We must also be prepared for a quixotic season to deliver an especially wet August. Most sympodial orchids will be completing their growths, so substituting liquid fertilizer for water is an excellent thing to do. Keep up the disease control schedule from Florida Orchid Growing (pg. 168) to have your plants protected from the disease threat that always looms in September. The drier conditions that have prevailed also open the potential for mites to attack the soft new leaves of Dendrobiums, Catasetums, Phaius and Calanthes. Mite damage first manifests itself as silvery patches, usually on the underside of the leaves. These lesions later oxidize and turn black, which is frequently mistaken for fungus, particularly in Phalaenopsis. Two ounces of liquid dish washing soap (we recommend Ajax) per gallon of water applied twice at 7-10 days' interval will give good control. Other chemicals are recommended in Florida Orchid Growing. As in any summer, the constant rains have given free range to our relentless enemy, the snail. Remember, snail bait should be applied very lightly (one pellet per square foot or less) but frequently every 10 days to two weeks.

The longer nights of August yield up mornings that are cooler. Rising early will give one the energy to get much more done in the garden.

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Now that the serious rains of summer have begun, they have washed away most of our problems with Thrips and mites. Now our focus, as usual, is on attention to disease prevention. With the shorting day lengths of August and the typical afternoon thunderstorms, our plants stay wet longer overnight. Take some time to be sure your plants are spaced properly to insure good air movement through them. Also, it's always a good idea to maximize the amount of light your plants receive by trimming trees and shrubbery. This too increases air movement and speeds drying. The snails are, of course, loving the rain and your neighbors have doubtless not been as diligent as you in controlling them. One or two rainy nights will allow snails to travel long distances. Remember to apply snail bait very lightly but frequently (every 10-12 days) for complete control.

September

[8]:

Space plants to permit more air circulation.

Trim trees to permit more light and lessen wind load.

Clean up growing area.

Remove dead leaves or other organic matter. This helps to remove potential for diseases which thrive on both dead and living plant material. See [Florida Orchid Growing](#).

Tidy up old pots or other objects on the ground.

Apply snail bait, lightly and frequently.

Quarternary ammonium chloride compounds (Phyosan, Consan, pool algacides) are very useful for disinfecting plants and growing areas even when they are wet from rain.

[19]

Space plants to permit more air circulation

Trim trees to permit more light and lessen the wind load on them

Clean up growing area removing any dead leaves or other organic matter

Tidy up old pots or other objects on the ground

Apply snail bait; lightly, frequently

Although August can yield some patches of excellent drying weather, but it might also be wetter than usual. Disease pressure on our plants can be severe. Both bacterial and fungal diseases can be prevalent to a degree not usual for August. We must be extra vigilant and respond immediately to any leaf spotting or discoloration of foliage. Immediately move the plant undercover if possible. Now is a good time to practice greenhouse hygiene by removing any old dead dry leaves. By removing dead leaves, one also removes the potential for other

diseases, as several diseases thrive on both dead and living plant material. On dead leaves they can, of course, go unobserved. If all dead material is removed, the eye is immediately drawn to any new discoloration, instantly alerting us to any emerging problem. The disease control and treatments recommended in Florida Orchid Growing are especially needed this year. September may be even wetter than usual. Even if one has been good at controlling snails all summer, the wet conditions of August have permitted them to make a fresh assault. Often the first wave of this new campaign appear as small, half grown specimens no bigger than your fingernail. They will soon grow fat on the soft newly completed growths of our orchids. These snails are hatched from the eggs of those large snails we killed earlier. Eradicating them before they can produce eggs will give us a leg up on snail control for next year. Remember apply snail bait lightly (one pellet per square yard) and frequently (every two weeks).

Days are shorter. If watering is necessary, consider substituting liquid fertilizer. Be sure to water early in the day. Withhold fertilizer from Himalayan Dendrobiums, Catasetums, Calanthes and other genera which are preparing to go dormant.

Mornings are now becoming deliciously cool. Enjoy working with your orchids and in your garden.

October

[8]

Space plants to increase air circulation

Water as early as possible in the day

Move Himalayan dendrobiums, catasetums, calanthes and other seasonally dormant plants to dry bright locations.

Reduce general fertilizer

Apply extra magnesium and potassium

[18]

September in south Florida often feels more like August. Although there were considerable periods of overcast and drizzle there were unusually long periods of dry weather punctuated with heavy rainfall producing more than average accumulations of rain. Surprisingly for September, dry weather persisted for long enough that Thrips became a problem.

At whatever season, when 3-4 days pass without rain and the temperature is above 85F (30C) Thrips are likely to attack our orchids. If warm weather persists into October as it usually does, and periods of drought occur, the measures of control outlined in Florida Orchid Growing will need to be applied. Because of its persistence, a single application of acephate(Orthene) will usually suffice at this time of year to control Thrips.

As usual snails are on the move and black rot must be guarded against. Be sure to look at each of your plants every day to protect them. Move infected plants to a dry spot and remove any diseased tissue with a sterilized cutting tool. This is

the season when the truth of the adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

Of the chemicals recommended in Florida Orchid Growing, Alliette is probably the most practical for the home grower. Applied prophylactically, Alliette will prevent black rot altogether. Applied to infected plants it will cure them. Our vandas are enjoying all of the water falling from the sky and section Callista dendrobiums are pushing an extra new grow. Be sure to feed these. Many dendrobiums, cattleyas, and Catasetinae are slipping into rest. Be careful of watering these as days are shortening quickly and drying potential is ebbing fast.

Look for an abundance of flower spikes emerging on our vandas as a result of the wider swing of day to night temperatures.

November [17]

Winter is coming. Prepare for the cold. Reduce fertilizer.
Apply extra potassium and magnesium.
Segregate dormant genera in a bright, dry area.
Repot plants after flowering.
Groom plants and flower spikes for holiday display.

A wet October normally comes to an exceptionally wet end. Soggy October weather is always problematic as the shorter days and longer nights allow for much less drying time. Properly-spaced plants and bright growing conditions are essential to weathering a wet October without losses.

Good cultural practices and the spray program outlined in Florida Orchid Growing, faithfully followed across the rainy season also ensure that disease problems will be minimized should late rains occur.

Regular spraying as recommended also minimizes the possibility of leaf spotting diseases including the dreaded Phyllostictina which is spread by slow late season rains which allows the rough lesions to open, infecting leaves higher up the plant. Because the symptoms occur later, seemly mysteriously, with the onset of cold weather, many people do not realize that the time to prevent this disease is in the late rainy season.

Thiophanate methyl (Cleary's 3336 or Thiomil) provides thorough control if applied consistently in the recommended fashion.

At this juncture care should be taken to dry our plants as thoroughly as possible until the true onset of the dry season occurs. While the rain and the cooler temperatures that they bring diminishes the threat from Thrips, they could still be problematic as things dry out. Mites are also waiting and hoping for our plants to dry out. Luckily, the best home cure is now available because of the lower temperatures of November. Three tablespoons of cooking oil per gallon of water can now be applied to all plant surfaces using a sprayer that is kept agitated. This spray should be followed in 7-10 days by four tablespoons of liquid dish

soap (such as Publix Mild & Gentle) per gallon. This order of spraying is best as the soap will remove some of the oil and in the process eliminate the possibility of burning our plants should unseasonably hot weather occur. Repeating this regime twice more before truly hot weather returns in mid-March will keep our plants clean of mites and greatly reduce the threat of Thrips.

If you have not already made two or three light applications of snail bait during the October deluge, it is probably too late, unless a patch of rainy weather occurs early in November. The snails will regrettably be back from their long winter's rest in February. Meanwhile, moving the dormant genera to drier locations and re-potting sympodial orchid which have flowered, is the perfect excuse to be outside.