

At our Last Meeting

Growing Orchids Epiphytically by Sara Rittershausen (at Burnham Nursery, 20th March)

At our latest meeting Sara gave us a masterclass demonstration and 'lively' discussion on attaching Orchids to bark (and other media) to grow them more epiphytically. Sara explained that as well as offering an alternative display type to the usual pot-based growing it also allows many orchids to be grown more naturally allowing for their growth and flowering to mimic their usual growth patterns found in nature. Sara demonstrated this with some of the examples found in the nursery, as well as a few interesting displays supplied by Ron Woolway including some very healthy



Above: A display of Burnham Nursery and Ron Woolways epiphytically grown orchids



Above: Differing media used as orchid mounts

Pleurothallids that looked especially effective grown in this manner. Of course, this method suits some genera and species of orchids more than others – Sara explained that those that spread by 'stoloniferous' growths in chains are especially suited to this method of growing. It also requires some extra cultivation provision in terms of watering and humidity, but once an orchid becomes happy with its new growing style they often root into their new medium very happily.

Sara then went on to showing us some of the differing media that could be used to attach your orchids, of which the most common was the Cork Oak bark, but there was also tree fern husks and coconut fibre – the audience even contributed with the likes of Gorse trunk (from Dartmoor) and chunks of Sweet Chestnut

that had made successful mounts. The main contributing factor was a slight porosity and the ability to stay relatively stable under humid conditions without rotting away too quickly.

Sara then went onto demonstrating the method of attachment using a piece of orchid she had already removed from another plant. Using a slab of cork oak, she first orientates the section of

Orchid to ensure it 'lays' nicely on the contours of the mount and has sufficient room to grow into as well as anchoring itself with roots. Using sphagnum moss (although other

mosses will suffice) she packs around the section of orchid to give the new plant sufficient moisture and humidity during its initial establishment. Using a good galvanised wire (to prevent rusting) she then attached the orchid in two points, wrapping the wire sufficiently around the bark slab to anchor the plant firmly, but not too tight to damage the plant. Finally, a small hole was drilled at the top of the slab to attach a wire hook to allow the slab to be displayed vertically. The use of wire was certainly a talking point



Above: Sara demonstrating attaching an orchid to its epiphytic mount



Above: The finished orchid attached to its mount and ready for growing on.

with many in the audience and Sara proposing alternatives such as string, thin tubing and even old tights (Eds. Note: Robert Goodenough has a stash apparently!)

Overall, it was a fantastic afternoon from Sara to show us that pot culture, although popular, isn't the only way to grow our fabulous plants. By growing them epiphytically in this method some genus/species may show better cultivation results and it also allows us to use the vertical elements of our growing

space that previously may be going to waste. I for one look forward to seeing more slab-grown plants at forthcoming society table shows.

Saul Walker