

JUDGING CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS

I am and have been a judge on the Orchid Society of NSW panel for just on 50 years. I have judged, and led a panel at numerous World Conferences.

I was a judge for the Sydney Morning Herald when they used to hold their Sydney Garden Competitions. I have judged various sections of Horticultural shows.

I operate a wholesale nursery specialising in Orchids and Indoor foliage Plants. I have been a Professional Nurseryman all my working life. I think that I speak with some knowledge.

The AOC standards for judging Cymbidiums says clearly: “**the stem shall be sufficiently strong to support the inflorescence unaided. It should be long and may be straight, arched or pendulous but not twisted. Under general rules for uniform judging**”, it says, “**staking and tying for support will be permitted. The judging panel have the right to remove any staking and/or tie if necessary, in order to ascertain the strength of the flower spike.**” So much for the theory.

It was always accepted policy that the spike could be tied to below the bottom flower. This was a practical solution to the tying problem. It is just not practical in a judging situation to ask for a spike to be untied. For one thing, if anything was to happen so the spike was damaged; the owner would obviously be upset. Then quite often the plant may be in a display and not easily accessible. Then there is also the time factor; it is obviously not practical to stand around as a spike is untied, even if access is possible. Now here another problem arises; say a spike of flowers is outstanding, but on untying it is not self supporting. It then cannot be judged, but makes the judges look silly as the best plant is not awarded.

This whole staking business began some years ago, when the late *John Mata* started to exhibit. *John* was without doubt the finest Cymbidium grower we have seen. He spent a lot of time grooming his plants and found he could get the best results if the spike was vertical. As the spikes became even bigger, he found that he had to stake further and further up the spike. On a few occasions he was asked could the ties be undone. Ever helpful he said of course. Because the spike did not need to strengthen itself, as it was supported by the stake and ties, the spikes started to bend and would have broken, if left untied, even if only for the judging.

His plants were so superior to those of the other contestants, that there was no option other than to reward them even if they did not meet the necessary standard; i.e. **tied to the bottom flower or were self supporting.**

Because John was so successful, his methods were copied, and staking into the flowers became an accepted method of preparing plants for the show bench.

Nobody queried it, and suddenly the rules appear to have been altered.

I have been told that if spikes are not tied to the top they cannot be transported or whatever. This is nonsense. To those who remember, the Sydney Town Hall was regularly filled with flowers that were tied according to the rules. I can assure you the vehicles used for transport then were far inferior inside to those we have today.

In my Nursery we send out all our flowering plants tied to the bottom flower. We ship to Queensland, Victoria and South Australia, and of course locally. All that is done is that the plants

are put in a sleeve. These are simple to put on and take off. For local deliveries, even this precaution is often not required.

The main problem with this business of staking to the top flower is one of aesthetics. If you look at a group or even one plant tied in this manner, the gracefulness of slightly arched spikes with all the flowers looking at you is not there. **Most spikes generally have a slight arch with the flowers facing forward**, if they are left to their own devices. The sticks that are used for staking clash with the flowers whether they are of green or natural colour.

Whenever flowers, animals or plants are being shown for prizes, they are manipulated and played with, you just don't leave the mechanisms used on display. It reminds me of ladies going to the ball with their hair still in curlers. In other words a lot of work is denied the ultimate perfect finish. We can do better.

I would suggest that the Cymbidium clubs discuss this matter, and provided they agree with the above, give say 12 months notice to their members of their decisions and then police it. It would appear that the **rules of judging are not being policed**, and whatever happens is accepted. There is a proper way to judge, and when the rules are followed we will all, growers and judges, have more pride in what we do.

GORDON GILES