



## ANOS Sydney Directory

**Patron:**  
Michael Harrison  
Macquarie Native Orchids

**President:**  
Andrew Locke  
0401 990 739

**Secretary:**  
Shoo Peng Siah  
0421 730 211

**Treasurer:**  
Joe Portelli  
0400 640 818

**Vice-President:**  
John Klepetko  
0447 497 001

**Committee:**  
Yin Chan  
Sau-wan Chan  
Ron Formby  
Barry Moore  
Chris Nidagal  
Graeme Russell  
Laurie Treanor  
Jan Mohandas

**Editor:**  
Charlie Moraza  
0413 440 677  
cmoraza@gmail.com

**Correspondence:**  
The Secretary ANOS  
Sydney Group  
9 Alicia St. Glenwood  
NSW 2768

**Email:**  
anossydney@gmail.com

# The Australasian Native Orchid Society Sydney Group

## ***"The Orchidophile" January 2017***

[www.anos.org.au/sydney](http://www.anos.org.au/sydney)  
[www.facebook.com/ANOSSydney](https://www.facebook.com/ANOSSydney)

The Group meets on the 3rd Friday of each month at 8.00pm in the Baulkham Hills Community Centre, Conie Ave, Baulkham Hills

**Wishing Everyone a Happy New Year!**  
**Next Meeting Friday 20th January 2017.**

**Guest Speaker: Jorn Villien**  
***Australian Native Terrestrial Orchids: A Beginner's Guide.***



**Native Terrestrial Orchid *Dipodium hamiltonium***  
**Photo by Jan Mohandas**

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All correspondence to *The Orchidophile* should be addressed to the Editor. The opinions expressed by the contributors to the newsletter are not necessarily those held by the Editor, committee or ANOS Sydney Group.

## Our Club Bulletin Board

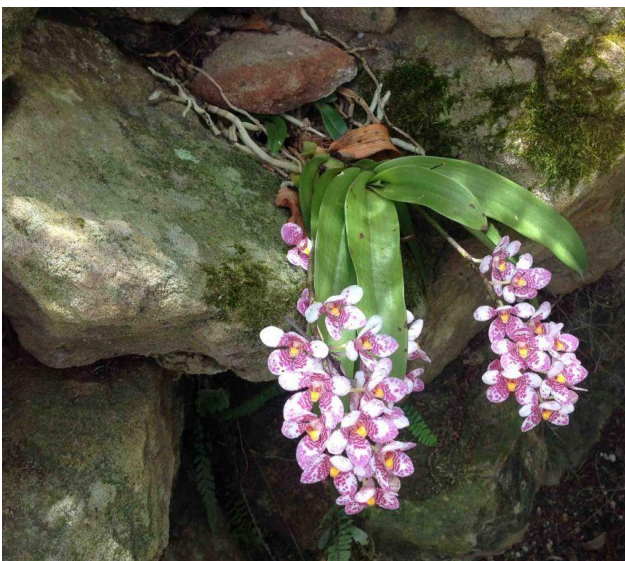
### Our Guest Speaker: Jorn Villien

**Topic:** Australian native terrestrial orchids: a beginner's guide.

The talk will mostly be on growing the more common species of Australian terrestrial orchids.

Jorn and Yvonne Villien have been growing orchids since they inherited Yvonne's parents orchid collection (mostly Australian natives) some years ago. Due to Jorn and Yvonne's backyard being very shaded especially in the winter months they found *Sarcochilus* grew and flowered best under their conditions. Consequently their inherited *Dendrobiums* have found new homes, while Jorn and Yvonne have gradually increased their collection of *Sarcochilus* orchids. Jorn is an outstanding photographer of orchids, is a qualified ANOS Judge, and has a special interest in native terrestrial orchids.

**Photos of Jorn and Yvonne's garden:**



### Jorn's Terrestrial Orchid Photos:



*Diuris punctata*



*Diuris aurea*



*Pterostylis curta*



*Diuris Pioneer*



## Reminder Membership Fees

If you have overlooked renewing your membership for 2016/2017 please take this opportunity to pay the annual membership fee (\$20) and thus avoid discontinuation of your membership.

### **Fees can be paid by:**

1. Direct deposit into the group's bank account. The details for this are as follows:

**Account name:** Australasian Native Orchid Society Sydney Group

**BSB:** 032289

**Account Number:** 130506

**(Please enter your name in the relevant field when making online payments)**

2. Cash directly to our **Membership Secretary** Joe Portelli at our meetings.
3. Posting a cheque or money order payable to ANOS Sydney Group, to:

**The Membership Secretary**  
**ANOS Sydney Group**  
**9 Alicia St Glenwood**  
**NSW 2768.**

The cost of renewal is \$20 for Single or Joint Family Membership.

If you have any queries please contact the Membership Secretary at [anosydney@gmail.com](mailto:anosydney@gmail.com).

## **ANOS Sydney Group Polo Shirts**

We still have a few club polo shirts available. For anyone interested in getting one, please get in touch with:

**Charlie Moraza**  
Tel: 0413440677  
Email: [cmoraza@gmail.com](mailto:cmoraza@gmail.com)

**Member Price: \$20.00**  
**Non-member Price: \$25.00**



## Life Membership awarded to Ron Formby

Ron Formby was awarded Life Membership of ANOS Sydney Group at the Christmas Party. Ron has been an active member of Sydney Group for more than 21 years. Ron has served on the Committee for many of those years and continues to support and provide his significant knowledge and experience in this capacity. Ron was Editor of The Orchidophile from 1995-1999, has been Sydney Group's Show Marshall at both the Group's shows until recently, and has acted as Benching Steward at Sydney Meetings for many years. Ron has also coordinated and run without fuss the annual point score competition, collating results after each meeting, and providing the information each month for publication in The Orchidophile, again for many years.



Ron has been generous in providing and assisting the Group with his knowledge and expertise in printing and graphics, and arranged the design and



printing of benching slips, benching signs and other group material as has been needed from year to year.

Ron's organisation, reliability and good memory has ensured the smooth running of countless shows and other Group activities (from Benching to Christmas Parties).

Ron is a reliable and dependable member of Sydney Group, regularly attends meetings and makes them all the more enjoyable. Without Ron the group would be much poorer. Sydney Group has great pleasure in awarding Ron Life Membership.

## **Christmas Party Plant of the Evening:**

*Dendrobium Pacific Pride* – Bernadette Williams



Australian Orchid Nursery**2016 Popular Vote Competition Results:**

Rank	Member	Score	Prize
1	Y. & S. Chan	20	\$150 AON seedling voucher
2*	B. Spurrs	8	\$70 AON seedling voucher
3	P. Murn	8	\$30 AON seedling voucher
4	R. & W. Bird	6	
5	B. & C. Bradley	6	
6	D. Butler	5	
7	C. Shaw	4	
7	J. Hurst	4	
8	J. Portelli	3	
8	T. Miller	3	
9	M. Daniels	3	
10	D. Tomich	2	
11	C. Nidagal	1	
11	G. Russell	1	

\* ranked #2 based on a higher number of first places

**2016 Annual Point Score Results:**

(Totals from the monthly meeting benching competition results)

Rank	Member	Score	Prize
1	B. Spurrs	191	\$40
2	Y. & S. Chan	176	\$30
3	C. Bradley	145	\$20
4	G. Steenbeeke	106	\$10
5	P. Murn	75	Seedling
6	M. Harrison	40	Seedling
7	J. Portelli	35	Seedling
8	D. Butler	32	Seedling
9	S. Holland	29	Seedling
10	C. Shaw	26	Seedling
10	B. Willians	26	Seedling
11	J. Hurst	21	
12	T. Miller	19	
12	C. Nidagal	19	
13	G. Russell	17	
14	M. Daniels	13	
14	A. Locke	13	
15	R. & W. Bird	12	
16	S. P. Siah	7	
17	G. Oehm	6	
18	D. Tomich	3	

Australian Orchid Nursery**2016 Popular Vote Competition Winners:**

**1st Place: Yin & Sau-wan Chan**



**2nd Place: Bryan Spurrs**



**3rd Place: Keith Powel for Phyl Murn**



## 2016 Annual Point Score Winners:



**1st Place: Bryan Spurrs**



**2nd Place: Yin & Sau-wan Chan**



**3rd Place: Clover Bradley**



**4th Place: Greg Steenbeeke**



**6th Place: Michael Harrison**



**7th Place: Joe Portelli**



**9th Place: Simone Holland**



**10th Place: Chan Op Shaw**

## Additional Monthly Benching Sections/Classes for 2017

The Committee has reviewed the benching sections used at General Meetings and has decided to increase the number of sections by three. The aim is to try to further encourage members to bring in their flowering orchids each month by providing benching sections that suitably reflect and accommodate the range of plants currently grown.

The following additions have been made to the benching sections. If any unforeseen issues arise with the changes the Committee will re-evaluate and amend the sections accordingly.

### Changes:

#### 1) 'Sarcanthinae species' has been split into the following 3 sections:

1. ***Sarcochilus* species – classic shape.** *Sarcochilus* species classic shape includes those species with a large and full, round, filled-in shaped flowers: *Sarco. fitzgeraldii*, *Sarco. hartmannii*, *Sarco aequalis* and *Sarco falcatus*.
2. ***Sarcochilus* species – novelty.** Novelty *Sarcochilus* species are those that do not fall within the *Sarcochilus* species classic shape section. It includes those *Sarcochilus* species that contain small flowers and/or flowers that are not full, round and filled in: *Sarco. australis*, *Sarco. ceciliae*, *Sarco. dilatatus*, *Sarco. hillii*, *Sarco. hirticalcar*, *Sarco. minutiflos*, *Sarco. olivaceus*, *Sarco. serrulatus*, *Sarco. spathulatus*, *Sarco. weinthalii*, and relatives.
3. **Other Sarcanthinae species** – non *Sarcochilus*. Sarcanthinae species other than those in the genus *Sarcochilus* (ie. those Sarcanthinae species not covered in the above two sections).

#### 2) 'Sarc. and Other Epiphytic hybrids' has been split into the following 2 sections:

1. **Sarcanthinae hybrids.**
2. **Other epiphytic hybrids.** This includes all epiphytic hybrids not covered in the other hybrid benching sections that may contain epiphytes: *Dendrobium*, *Dockrillia*, Sarcanthinae and Australasian.

#### Monthly benching sections/classes for 2017 (with previous sections for comparison):

New (2017) Sections	Previous Sections
1. Dendrobium species	1. Dendrobium species
2. Dendrobium hybrids	2. Dendrobium hybrids
3. Dockrillia species	3. Dockrillia species
4. Dockrillia hybrids	4. Dockrillia hybrids
<b>5. Sarcochilus species – classic shape</b>	5. Sarcanthinae species
<b>6. Sarcochilus species – novelty</b>	
<b>7. Other Sarcanthinae species – non Sarcochilus</b>	
<b>8. Sarcanthinae (Sarc.) hybrids</b>	6. Sarc. and Other Epiphytic hybrids
<b>9. Other Epiphytic hybrids</b>	
10. Other Epiphytic species	7. Other Epiphytic species
11. Australasian species	8. Australasian species
12. Australasian hybrids	9. Australasian hybrids
13. Pterostylis species	10. Pterostylis species
14. Diuris species	11. Diuris species
15. Caladenia species	12. Caladenia species
16. Other Terrestrial species	13. Other Terrestrial species
17. Terrestrial hybrids	14. Terrestrial hybrids
18. 1st flowering seedlings (ex mericlones)	15. 1st flowering seedlings (ex mericlones)

Note: New sections are highlighted in **bold**.

## Why Bench Orchids at Our Monthly Meetings?

### *(For our newer members)*

The benching and displaying of our Australian and Australasian native orchids at Sydney Group meetings is important for a range of reasons. In addition to allowing members and other attendees to appreciate the form and culture of the plants benching, benching at meetings:

- generates interest and enthusiasm in a wider range of native orchids than those encountered in individual collections or readily accessible in nature;
- promotes discussion of native orchids and their culture, and their potential in hybridisation and in-line (within species) breeding;
- helps to raise awareness of orchid conservation issues; and
- attracts new members and increase meeting attendance.

### **Who should bench orchids at meetings?**

All Members are encouraged by the Committee to where possible bring plants in flower to meetings regardless of whether the member thinks the plant would be in contention to win the section it is benching in. The more plants benching the better the display and the more talking points and learning available.

However Members should be aware that plants brought to meetings must be well established, healthy, disease and pest free. The Benching Steward has the responsibility to remove a plant if it is considered unsuitable for benching.

### **Annual Point score explained**

The Point score is run between January and November each year, with points awarded only for our monthly table benching results. No points are awarded for our Spring and Sarcanthinae Show.

Plants benching for judging must have been owned and in the possession of the exhibitor for at least six months. Benching slips must be completed legibly with the name of the plant, section benching and the name of the exhibitor.

The Judges indicate on the benching slip the place any individual plant has attained in its respective class.

All Benching slips are collected at the finish of each monthly meeting, and the points tallied up and added to the monthly results of each member.

At the end of the year the cumulative points of each member are totalled and arranged in numeric order, with prizes awarded for 1st, 2nd and 3rd, and the prizes presented at the Christmas Party.

Points awarded (to each plant) vary depending on the number of plants benching in the individual sections (refer to table).

Place in section	1 to 10 plants in section	11 to 20 plants in section	21-30 plants in section
First (1st)	4	5	6
Second (2nd)	3	4	5
Third (3rd)	2	3	4
every other plant	1	1	1

Judges also select a Plant of the Evening. An additional 3 points is awarded for "Plant of the evening", irrespective of any points that plant may have already received.

Every other plant benching is awarded 1 point, so you could feasibly win the Point score just by benching the most plants throughout the year. The Point score is to encourage members to bring their plants along to meetings. Although I am sure you will gain much more kudos from your fellow members if you bench well grown quality plants.

So, to allow other members to enjoy your plants and appreciate your efforts; bring those flowering plants along to our monthly meetings.

- John Klepetko



## Out And About (Tall Tales but Very True)

By Mark Daniels – Stronggrow Orchids

### ***How to germinate Cymbidium canaliculatum without a lab or flask culture:***

Ken Russell has successfully worked out how to germinate *Cymbidium canaliculatum* from seed in situ, without a lab or flask culture (which up until now has not been very successful and still will take more years to work out). They just do not grow right in flasks and under lights. What does Ken do? Well, not much. You see it's about the growing medium used to grow the *Cym. canaliculatum*. If you want to germinate seed, Ken discovered that pine bark based mix will not work, it will grow mature plants but that's all. When you use a modified mix (this is my assessment of the growing mix), Ken has them jumping out of their pots. Try it on a few plants first. It might not work for you, but it works for Dan Tomich and me. The treatment is a fairly standard procedure now for most growers. I will show you some large plants at our next meeting using 15mm to 30mm gauge components made up of the following;

#### **Growing Medium Mix:**

- 4 parts aged hardwood wood chips, (mixed, grey box or blue gum).
- 1 part aged pine bark or Forest Casuarina bark.
- 1/2 part coconut husk.
- 1/2 part porous coarse gravel not smooth (volcanic red Scoria, North Coast white scoria or coarse white screened ash).

Then treat this mix. This is what I use to treat my growing mediums. In dry powder form, 1 level cup = 200mls.

- 1 cup of dolomite.
- 2 cups of superfine agricultural lime.
- 1/2 cup of fertilizer salts low nitrogen (Aquasol or Scotts).
- 1 cup of a good quality blood and bone with added iron, or if not add 15mm of iron or trace elements.

Add medium mix to a full builder's barrow (1/8 of a cubic meter) and mix powder in well, add water until saturated, adding at the same time 30ml of household disinfectant (Hospital Grade) and 30ml of dishwashing liquid detergent then keep damp in the open air, turn it over every 2nd or 3rd day (on the ground on top of a plastic sheet) until it ages and smells sweet. This could take 4 weeks or 6 weeks depending on circumstances. It will change to a dark colour in about two days after the microbial action has taken off. Always remember to wear breathing, facial and skin-protection.

When Ken's plants get established in the first growing season in smaller than usual pots (as you will see from photos), he sprinkles the seed all over the growing plants.



Ken's *Cym. Canaliculatum* growing in small pots.

Because of the high cellulose sugars in the wood-chip (*cymbidium* sustaining food) that are being released constantly and combining with a high PH (7 to 8), the seed is able to grow and mature to healthy seedling plants.

But there was one thing Ken did not allow for – a helper mate who loves nothing better than to remove weeds and grass in pots. This particular day Ken's helper arrived and decided to do Ken a favour and clean up all the weeds in Ken's *Cym. caneliculatum* plants. They were well established and looking very happy. Well about 2 hours later after smoko while his mate was feeling good about a good mornings work, Ken decided to show somebody his baby seedlings that he was so proud of growing (hundreds of them). Well! You could imagine the scene when Ken discovered that his mate had pulled all his seedlings out off the pots, thinking they were grass weeds!

Lucky Ken is such a forgiving and understanding guy and said, "Oh well, we will do it again". Horticulture is a tough business. You think you're on a winner and then, oops! Nobody's fault. Just bad luck. His good mate was very upset about it though.

Before we left that day there was one pleasant surprise Ken had up his sleeve for me. It would be one of the rarest sights in the bush to see, a *Sarcochilus weinthalii* in full bloom!

How would you like to see this growing in your backyard? See you all for now. Cheers, until next month!



*Sarcochilus weinthalii*



## Member Snapshot – Joe Portelli

Our new club Treasurer, Joe has been a member of the club for a few years now and his photos of native orchids have been featured in past issues of our newsletter. This month, he kindly shares with us his story on his interest with Australian native orchids.



Joe Portelli

**Q: How did you become an orchid enthusiast?**

**Joe:** I must admit I'm not quite sure. I had an interest in botany/horticulture for many decades (I think this traces to the fact that farming was in the family background). At some stage, in the last seven or so years, I became intrigued by the life cycle of orchids and the beauty of their flowers. The rest followed from there.

**Q: Which are your favourite native orchids and why?**

**Joe:** Changes all the time! They all have their interesting features. *Dendrobium speciosum* and related species always features in my top 5 list.

**Q: Approximately how many "pots" in your collection?**

**Joe:** I have around 310 plants in my collection (virtually all listed in a spreadsheet which also contains associated information) – quite a few are mounted. I find mounted plants are much harder to kill but grow slower (less water/nutrient availability).

**Q: How often do you water your orchids?**

**Joe:** That of course depends on the season. A lot of plants get zero watering in Winter – only way they can survive Riverstone's winters which can result in temperature of -4°C. In Summer the mounted orchids are watered at least once daily – often twice or more. Small pots are watered every other day. Big pots once a week. All these are averages and needs vary to some extent.

**Q: Do you fertilise your orchids?**

**Joe:** I use both slow release fertiliser pellets and soluble fertiliser. Soluble fertiliser is applied once every 2 weeks at ½ to ¾ recommended rate. Slow release fertiliser pellets are mainly applied when re-potting.

However I do experiment with fertilisers and am trying to use more organic type fertilisers (rather than the dissolved salts types).

**Q: What are the common pests that attack your orchids and how do you control them?**

**Joe:** Scale insect – Controlled with a mix Eco oil and Pyrethrum based insecticides.

- **Red Spider Mite** – A mix of Imidacloprid (systemic action) and Pyrethrum (contact action)
- **Dendrobium beetle** – Catch-and-destroy (not too effective)

I also spray enclosed areas with a mix of Imidacloprid (systemic action) and Pyrethrum (contact action) insecticides on a regular basis (say every 3 weeks). Do not really like doing this but without doing so I had a lot of issues with insects.

**Q: What was the most memorable orchid collection you've visited?**

**Joe:** Must admit I haven't visited orchid collections recently. When I lived in Canberra I went to see David Judge's Paphiopedulum collection. That was very impressive.

**Q: Which is your favourite nursery to purchase orchids from?**

**Joe:** **Orchid Species Plus** and **Woolf Orchidculture** are the source of most of my non-native orchid species. **Woolf Orchidculture** and the **Australian Orchid Nursery** are the source of most of my native species. I am also always on the lookout for emerging players.

**Q: What was the worst mistake you ever made growing your orchids?**

**Joe:** The year I started collecting, I bought one of those "greenhouse" kits from ALDI – those ones which have tubes which slide end-on-end and give you a frame of, roughly 1.8m wide x 1.8m high x 0.5m deep. It also had a transparent poly cover which can cover the frame to form a sealed chamber. I placed almost all the orchids I had at the time (about 20) in this "greenhouse" and sealed them in with the poly cover for protection overnight (it was early spring and we were still getting quite cool weather). Problem was, I forgot to open the thing the next day and we had a very bright day. I lost most of the orchids that day – luckily I was just starting out and so only lost a few.

**Q: What would you advise novices thinking of or just starting out growing orchids?**

**Joe:** I still consider myself as being in a learning stage. What I advice others is what I find works for myself – I observe and ask what successful growers do. The potting mixes they use, growing conditions, fertilisation regimes used, watering, etc. I learn one plant type at-a-time.

## Joe Portelli (Cont.....)

**Q: What do you like about our club ANOS Sydney Group and what activity do you enjoy (or look forward to doing) the most?**

**Joe:** What I like the most is the lack of pretentiousness there is. Everyone is approachable and willing to help. There are quite a few who know what they're doing so there's a significant knowledge repository. I also find the benching really compelling. Besides the visual appeal of the flowering, it's also a source of learning (observing the potting media used, pots/mounts used, talking to the growers about how they grow their plants). Since starting to bench myself, I am finding I'm more motivated to improve on my cultural methods.

**Q: What is on your orchid wish list?**

**Joe:** Currently what features most prominently on my wish list are not plants, but the aspiration to grow better what I already have. Better growing conditions, more knowledge on the needs of specific species ... and other such things. I feel proud in knowing the fact that, this year, I spent much more on potting mixes, fertilisers and infrastructure than on plants.



*Cymbidium suave – Bilpin, Blue Mountains*

**Q: Is there anything else you may want to add?**

**Joe:** If I were to have another career I would chose one that combines all my interests: Electronics, Information Technology and Horticulture. I see a significant potential for this in making inexpensive equipment for environmental monitoring and control and task automation in horticulture. Incidentally I spent quite a bit of time in this area and have constructed various environmental monitoring and control systems for my growing areas.



*Gastrodia sp. – Mt. Tomah, Blue Mountains*

### Editor's Note:

*All photos by Joe Portelli*

*The Member Snapshot concept was adapted from the Maitland & Coalfields District Orchid Society bulletin. Thank you MCDOS and best wishes to all your members!*

## Bulletin Board (continued from page 5)

### Phil Spence - 2016 Australian Orchid Foundation Award of Honour.

Members will be pleased (though maybe not surprised) to hear that Phil Spence has been awarded the 2016 Australian Orchid Foundation Award of Honour.



Phil is well known to many Sydney Group members, having presented at ANOS Sydney numerous times over the years (most recently in 2015), and also having been at the forefront of breeding and hybridising Papua New Guinea species, in particular those in *Dendrobium* section Latouria.

**Sydney Group extends its congratulations to Phil in receiving the 2016 AOF Award of Honour.**

*Note: Further information on Phil's achievements is in the December 2016 issue of The Orchadian.*

## A Bit About.....Growing *Dendrobium speciosum*

By Gerry Walsh - [The Rock Lily Man](#)

There has been an awful lot of words written and spoken attempting to deal with the culture for *Dendrobium speciosum*. I guess that on a website dealing with a single species there has to be some information advising how to grow it. If you want in-depth knowledge, you can simply Google it up and I can tell you there are certainly a lot of good articles out there. Rather than prattling on about using this and that, all in very exacting quantities of course, and boring everyone senseless, I am really only going to give a few ideas to take into consideration.

The first thing that must be said about growing *D. speciosum* is this: *D. speciosum*, in all of its forms, is pretty easy to grow. I live in Western Sydney and I have experienced temperatures ranging from -6C all the way up to +46C. Cold temperatures do not appear to worry it. However, if frost actually settles on the leaves, the news is not going to be good. Frost protection is the most important thing for long-term success with *D. speciosum*. One frosty night can set back your plants for three or four years. Defoliation is the problem. Plants will recover however, but nothing is as ugly as a bush house full of leafless bulbs and a carpet of dead leaves on the gravel floor.

I know this from two major events in my growing career when frost got in and left me with wheelbarrow loads of freshly dropped and dead *D. speciosum* leaves. Heartbreaking in the extreme! Good news is that new growths will not be affected but it will take three years to grow out the old damage. If you do not take precautions you risk losing the new growths just matured the next time Jack Frost pays you a visit.

These days I just live with the acceptance that I must cover my bush house with an extra layer of shade cloth during the winter. I put it on at the start of June and it comes off again in late September. Conditions during this blackout are dark indeed. By June all racemes that are going to emerge are on their way. If I left the two layers on all year round, the number of racemes would be much lower than I get with one layer.

To see really successful flowerings, you must have strong light all year. As strong as you can provide without the sun actually damaging your plants. ***If your plants are not flowering for you, low light levels will almost always cause it.*** So, if your plants are housed between your garage and the six foot high side fence, you probably will not have enough light to form flowering eyes between the leaves of the new growths. Without eyes you cannot have flowers. Give your plants plenty of light all year and you are off to a good start with managing *D. speciosum*.

### Pots and Potting Media

Potting mix is the major decision you must come to grips with if you want to grow great speciosums. More words have been written on this topic than what appears in the Australian Tax Office guide to working out your annual Tax Return. You must realise that potting media and your watering regime go hand in hand with the selection of your pot size and shape. These three factors will govern whether or not you will be successful long term. And this may take you a while to work out using trial and error. There are no shortcuts.

It is not particularly hard to learn, so panic is not necessary. If you are a new grower you will need to know a couple of things. If you are strolling through Bunnings or the local supermarket and you see a bag of something labelled ORCHID POTTING MIX, please run for your life. 99 times out of a hundred this mix will be made for exotic *Cymbidium* Orchids. It is totally inappropriate for use with *D. speciosum*. You need to look for coarse or medium grade ORCHID BARK. This can be surprisingly hard to locate. Your best bet will always be to find a specialist orchid nursery. Even then, they often sell out and have no stock.

Orchid bark is graded and composted pine bark. Going down to the Landscape Supplies Yard and getting a box trailer full of uncomposted pine bark is not the way to go. Untreated pine bark has harsh toxins and phenols in it that will slow root growth. Some really good orchid bark is further treated with chemical additives that get rid of all these unwanted components of the pine bark. To sum up, do not waste your time with anything other than pre-packaged "ORCHID BARK". But never touch Orchid Mix. Got the picture?

Orchid bark comes in three sizes usually: Small, Medium and Coarse. What you use depends on a couple of important points. Firstly, the size of the piece you want to pot on. If you have ended up with a leading piece with three or more pseudobulbs as thick as your forearm, then you will be reaching for the coarse grade. That is if you are potting into a large pot. If you are a miser with your bark and pots and try and save a few cents, then you should be using the medium grade. If you end up with a few solid, leafless back bulbs that you think have potential, then you should be whacking them into the small grade, or a mix of small and medium.

Pot size is hard to explain. The big danger is writing about it, instead of demonstrating it to someone, particularly new chums. If you are potting on advanced seedlings into a 100mm or 150mm pot, then a good rule of thumb is to put it into a pot that is only twice as big as the plant in width. But not much deeper than the pot it came out of. And in this example you should be using medium size bark. Definitely not the coarse grade that would have too much air between the bark pieces. Ask a more experienced grower for advice if you know one.

Never stick a plant from a 100mm pot straight into a 250mm pot or bigger. It will just sit there like a half eaten sausage roll on a paper plate at a party. Consequently, it will take an extra few years to start growing along the way it should. Your object is to have your mix stay damp and humid, not to have it stay wet and smelly. And for heaven's sake, never sit your pot in a saucer and think what a great grower you are. Wet feet is the greatest mistake you can make with *D. speciosum*.

Most growers add various things to the bark as they use it. For large clumps in large pots, I am a dinosaur. I cannot convince myself to leave out a good handful of 15-20mm rough crushed rock/gravel. I know I know . . . modern growers shy away from using this rock these days. But I believe it lends rigidity to the mix and this is mighty handy if you are potting up a big piece with tall bulbs. I cannot believe that it does any harm.



## A Bit About.....Growing *Dendrobium speciosum* (cont...)



What good Orchid bark looks like.

Big orchids can rock back and forth and damage tender young root tips. You do not want this to happen. A bit of rock mixed with the bark will certainly make your specimen plants heavier, but sturdier.

Some people mix handfuls of polystyrene into the bark. They either break up old boxes into suitable size bits, or they go to Kmart and buy those big bags of beanbag polystyrene balls. They do have the advantage of staying warmer than rocks in the wintertime and this may aid in the roots staying a bit on the active side. Others use Perlite in their mix. Years ago others used Scoria, a volcanic rock. Some have used glass wool, so I have read in orchid magazines. Holy hell! I have no idea what glass wool even is! I just pass the messages around; I seldom make them up.

I will tell you one thing that you should be aware of. Ten years ago, a whole bunch of growers got caught up in the rush to use chopped up coconut husk as potting medium. This product came here in great bales from the tropical regions and it was cheap and easy to use. I and others issued guarded warnings about its use. We believed that it would inevitably become too wet and cause troubles. I have heard rumours that some growers have had their wings clipped and regret having ever seen the stuff.

Chief among the issues was, surprise surprise, *D. speciosum* plants started to go backwards. Third hand information was varied. Some ideas were that you had to repot every couple of years or the coconut started to rot, along with the orchid roots. I also heard reports that heavy use of fertiliser and chemicals caused issues. I really do not know the problems first hand. I also hear that some big nurseries have stuck with coconut husk/fibre and have had great success.

In a lot of instances, and with many other species, coconut might be simply brilliant, but I will not believe it for *D. speciosum*. Perhaps if the watering regime has been worked out whereby the coconut is left til nearly dry, then it may well be possible to maintain the balance of water and air at the correct levels. The first few months of 2012 in Sydney experienced record rainfall. If you had an open bush house, you had no choice in how much water your plants received. I even lost some growths that were left a bit long in the normal bark mix, let alone being in coconut fibre. It was so wet for a lot of months.

To sum this hoo-ha up, I admit that I do not know nearly enough about the use of coconut and I am not qualified to make sweeping statements on its use. If you want to use it . . . do so at your own peril and good luck. Last thing I would say is this. How could a specimen-sized hunk of *D. speciosum* var. *grandiflorum*, with 20 or so long fat bulbs, and racemes on board, stay upright in a pot full of mushy coconut husk? It might sit all right on the bench in your bush house but to transport it around . . . I doubt it.



### Fertilising *D. speciosum*

Now, the most Important bit. Yes, I am giving up my secret weapon! I learnt this lesson the hardest way possible. I was, for a couple of decades, the laziest grower of *D. speciosum* you could imagine. I was always pretty happy with my results during this time. But I never seemed to get my best plants into the best show condition. It took eons to realise what my problem was. Two things eventually dawned on me.

Firstly, *D. speciosum* is a guts, it needs plenty of food in the form of fertiliser. Not just a spray with something once or twice a year, but a continuous regime of well balanced fertilising. This is a species that produces big heavy bulbs in the main, and it cannot do that without the building blocks of life . . . FOOD!

I have not got the patience to waffle on about N:P:K ratios and certain levels of calcium, or molybdenum, or the eye lashes from a female zebra in season, blah blah blah. Perhaps, if you have a handle on this kind of science, you may win dividends on the show bench. Just maybe you might screw it all up too. But I am not a chemist and nearly failed science at school. I only know a few things that work well. Just fertilise all the time and vary what you apply. I do tend to use things that have added trace elements.

For three years now I have been committing the following feeding plan. I stick a handful of organic "stuff" in each pot. This may be blood and bone, dynamic chook pellets, or anything else with a bit of body that will not wash away through the bark at the next watering. I repeat this application when I can no longer see any of it left in the pots, but I use something different every other time. Never the same thing twice in a row. There is no science at all in this shattering plan of mine. I can hear you agreeing with me . . .

## A Bit About.....Growing *Dendrobium speciosum* (cont...)

I have also started putting a cupful of long term Osmocote in the pots as well. I simply do not have time to mix up great amounts of water-soluble fertiliser on a weekly basis. In my case, that would be an all day job. However, once every six weeks or so, I make the time to do it, just because I turned over a new leaf a few years back and intend sticking with it. So Osmocote is letting out a little bit of oomph each time I water or it rains.

There you go. You have my secret and fiendish plan to conquer the show benches of the future. If more than this much work is needed, maybe I will scuttle the orchids and take up stamp collecting. As I said before, this is what I do now and results have been good in that short term, with big healthy bulbs the result. I hope the racemes will carry the flag for me. I will not claim that there are not better ways to feed your orchids. As I said, get onto Google, there is lots of info on orchid fertilising. They will have much more science in them for you to get happy on, if you think I might be wrong . . . perish the thought.

### Re-potting *D. speciosum*

The second thing that I discovered once I slipped out of my lazy ways is this. You simply cannot grow good *D. speciosum* unless they have terrific and healthy root systems. And you cannot have healthy root systems if your potting mix is let go like mine was. I kept some of my plants captive in the same pots for up to 12 years.

Sharing some of the pots were Elk Horns, Birds Nest Ferns, Hares Foot Ferns and Rock Velvet Fern (*Pyrosia sp.*). I even had a couple of tree ferns settled in. Worst of all was a vast assortment of weeds that eventually got so thick that I was forced to do an eight month long utterly destructive re-potting of about eighty per cent of my entire collection. This required around seventy bags of orchid bark. Mrs. Walsh has no idea how much of our hard-earned cash I shifted around like some of them shady characters in Wall Street movies.

After years of being left under these conditions the rot set in. New bulbs were not coming or started rotting before they matured etc. Ants moved in, slugs were all about, frogs took up residence and all sorts of caterpillars found safe quarters. I thought I saw a tree-kangaroo in their one day but this remains an unconfirmed sighting at this stage.

Eventually in my life, I started to hear rumours that there was a thing called pH. I listened to experts and read articles that I had skipped over for years. I worked out that my sodden, composted pine-bark/soil must have been pure sulphuric acid in the main.

These days I have started to throw lime at the plants with great abandon. Others do it and so far I have not seen it causing any problems. I have never heard of soils or orchid bark turning alkaline, they only ever go acidic. Lime swings the pH back towards the good zone.

The other reason I now broadcast lime about the pots and the floor of the bush house is simple indeed. It gives me great pleasure to watch slugs and garlic snails racing around with their little bums on fire. Lime actually takes care of a lot of these pesky varmints that will feast on your racemes next season. It also has the effect of keeping a lot of fungal problems under control.

The message is this: **DO NOT PUT OFF YOUR RE-POTTING.** You must do it when the time is right. Your instincts will tell you when that time is nigh. I have no intention of explaining how to repot your *D. speciosums*. Every plant will be different. And it is the type of activity that has to be demonstrated. Most orchid groups have demonstrations about re-potting. I suggest that these would be the best way to learn about it. Once you see one demonstration you will have a skill for life.

So there you have it: my thoughts on basic *D. speciosum* culture. I will repeat the following for the third time. If you feed the right words into Google you will find a wealth of good and thoroughly informative articles on every aspect of orchid culture. One day you might end up growing *D. speciosum* like I do. But you really ought to be setting your sights on far higher levels of achievement.



#### Editor's Note:

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Gerry's guide to watering *Dendrobium speciosum* orchids will be featured in next month's *Orchidophile*.



## Some Flowering Native Orchids

By Jan and Margaret Mohandas

This month, our new **Field Trips Officer and Conservation Officer Jan Mohandas** and his wife **Margaret** have provided us beautiful photos of native orchids that were found around Porter's Pass, Blackheath and Wentworth Falls.



*Thelymitra cyanea* – Porter's Pass



*Microtis species unidentified* – Wentworth Falls



*Cryptostylis subulata* – Wentworth Falls



*Caleana major* – Wentworth Falls



Dates to Remember...	
20 January 2017	ANOS Sydney Group – Monthly Meeting 8.00 pm to 10:00 pm <a href="#">Baulkham Hills Community Centre, Conie Ave, Baulkham Hills</a> Guest Speaker: Jorn Villien – Australian Native Terrestrial Orchids
26 February 2017	<a href="#">Hills District Orchids Autumn Open Day</a> <a href="#">183 Windsor Rd Northmead NSW</a> (Please park in Mary St. or Windermere Ave.) Vendors include: Tinonee Orchid Nursery & Macquarie Native Orchids
31 March – 1 April 2017	<a href="#">International Orchid Fair</a> Castle Hill Showground, Castle Hill
8 – 9 April 2017	<a href="#">Collectors Plant Fair</a> Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon Rd, Clarendon
26 – 28 May 2017	<a href="#">Orchids Out West</a> Hawkesbury Race Club, Clarendon Rd, Clarendon

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