

Orchid Seed Workshop



Orchid seedlings growing in sterile jars.

Before the holidays began in November, we had our first orchid seed germination workshop. Steve Dorsey hosted a group of enthusiastic growers of NWOS for a gathering to learn how to grow orchids from seed.

Growing orchids from seed may seem daunting, but this workshop was given to show that it is quite achievable in a home setting without elaborate or expensive equipment. All the items used were easily obtained. And while some seeds such as *Paphiopedilum* may take years to bloom, others such as *Habenaria* can be blooming within a year and a half. So don't let the time to bloom dissuade you from trying from seed. There are several that will bloom in a reasonable time.

Orchid seeds are small, so it doesn't take many to produce a lot of plants. Unlike many other seeds, they don't have any nutrients with them, so the food supply to cause germination has to be supplied. This is done by preparing media with agar, and nutrients which is simply done by boiling water and adding the powder mix to it. Using a simple canning pressure cooker provides sterile media for the seeds to grow in.

It is necessary to keep things very clean and to work in a sanitized area as bacteria and fungus in the air will damage the seeds. There are many options such as simply working in a plastic storage box with holes for your hands to poke through and up to what is pictured, which is a laminar flow box.



Lillian Otani demonstrating the laminar flow hood.

The important issue is to keep it clean while working. Seeds can be gained from partially developed seed pods called green pod or from seeds that have been released from fully mature and cracked seed pods.

Because green pods are much easier to decontaminate, they were used for demonstrating placing seeds into the agar containers. The process is simple, just care is needed for the sowing the seeds.



Green seed pod on a Cattleya



Seed pod opened



Placing seeds onto media

Once seeds are sown, then you just have to wait to see the little green blobs appear. I find that exciting as you then know you are on your way to making new plants. And in time you will have more plants than you need, so there will be plenty to go around for all your friends or to trade with others for plants you don't have.



Germinated seeds with their first leaf.

If you enjoy plants in general and have ever had a garden with plants you started from seed, this is a great way to have that same pleasure and who knows, you may create your own orchid that wins an award.

More workshops will be offered starting in the spring, so keep an eye out on the events listings on the NWOS webpage.

Happy Growing!