

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 12-17-08 – Orchids) , ©2005

Yikes! The Northwest Flower and Garden Show is less than seven weeks away! Tickets might be a nice last minute gift for someone you love. Go on line to www.gardenshow.com or even better visit one of these local nurseries selling tickets: Bainbridge Gardens and Bay Hay and Feed on Bainbridge, Valley Nursery in Poulsbo, Sacks Feed and Garden in Kingston, Country Nursery and Gardens on the way to Seabeck, or Peninsula Gardens, Rosedale Gardens and Wild Birds Unlimited all in Gig Harbor.

Every year I visit the orchid section and bring home another plant. My favorites are Dendrobiums an easy care, low cost genus with over 1500 species to choose from. The name is from the Greek word dendron (tree) and bios (life). These tantalizing plants grow nestled in trees. Their stems (vegetative growth) consist of small round bulbs and/or slender canes with leaves ranging from round and succulent to thin and grassy. Some Dendrobium leaves are evergreen and some are deciduous. Phalaenopsis (moth orchids) and Brassia (spider orchids) are in the genus Dendrobium.

If you'd like to contact, visit, or join a local orchid society write to: Northwest Orchid Society, P.O. Box 51021, Seattle WA 98115-1021 or call 206-781-5805. Their website is www.nwos.org. Meetings are the second Monday of each month in the evening at the Center for Urban Horticulture at University of Washington.

I found several websites you might want to peruse to learn more about orchids. All of these sites have abundant color photos and information for the amateur as well as true collectors. The American Orchid Society is <http://orchidweb.org/aboutorchids.html>. Linda (no last name given) has a very thorough website at www.orchidlady.com. This woman is obsessed with orchids but gleefully and intelligently shares her obsession and information with anyone who will visit the site. The PBS program Nova has a great site called the Orchid Hunter at www.pbs.org/wgbh/novid/orchid/gall - it's a veritable encyclopedia of plants, photos and cultural information for growing orchids. You might want to travel via the internet across the Atlantic to "All About Orchids" by the oldest Orchid Society in the world at <http://www.orchid.org.uk/> where you'll discover what the British have to say about orchids. This site is for the serious collector but also gives good information for novices too.

Many of the above sites list books to consult to learn more about orchids. The publishers of the Taylor Guides to Gardening and Timber Press are excellent resources for books on orchids. The magazine style publications from "Orchid Digest" are on line and subscriptions are available. Back issues of "Orchid Digest" can be ordered. The Orchid Lady also writes an article on orchids every month and the information is archived on her site. You might want to locate a few of these books at your favorite local bookstore or at the library: "Taylors Guide to Orchids" by Judy White; "Orchids Simplified: An Indoor Gardening Guide" by Henry Jaworski; "Home Orchid Growing" by Rebecca Tyson North; "Illustrated Encyclopedia of Orchids" edited by Alec Pridgeon; and "Orchid

Growing” by Peter McKenzie Black and Wilma Rittershausen. Most of these books were first published in the early to late 1990s so hopefully they’re all still in print.

A venerable WSU Master Gardener, Leon Mills showed me his secret to growing orchids quite a few years ago. Leon has a large tray-table running along a window. The tray-table contains a layer of rock. His pots of orchids sit on top of the rocks. Above the plants hangs a row of fluorescent lights. Leon keeps a shallow layer of water in the table, just enough to cover the rocks but not enough for the pots to be sitting in the water. His orchids live happily there with the humidity and light and are festooned with jewel-toned blossoms most months of the year.

I replicated this idea on a much smaller scale at my house. I group my collection of orchids in huge pots (about three to four plants to a pot). Each orchid resides in its own smaller pot full of bark chips on water-covered pebbles in the huge pots. All the pots are in a very bright space in a west facing room. Many books say “fertilize weakly weekly” but I’m a lazy and/or forgetful gardener and only fertilize my orchids infrequently (during the spring and summer). They still reward me with gorgeous blooms several times a year especially in the dreariest months (i.e. November through February) and again in summer.

If you’d like more information about growing orchids (especially Dendrobium) please call the WSU Extension Office at 360-337-7157 and I’ll send you some information, or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us or gardenmentor@yahoo.com.