



The Hardy Orchid Society

Newsletter

No.1 July 1996

CONTENTS

p.1	Introduction from the Chairman	p.2	Notes from the Committee
p.4	Lectures and Discussions at the AGM	p.5	Seed and Fungus Bank
p.6	Field trip to Kent - Report	p.7	Growing Orchids in the Open Garden
p.11	Growers Diary, Part 1	p.13	Orchid Hunting in Mallorca
p.15	Letters and Comments	p.16	Advertisement

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

There is a definite stage in the evolution of any society - a coming of age - when a hum of opinion suggests the time is ripe for the production of a newsletter or even a journal. And so, to use a hackneyed phrase, "it gives me great pleasure" to write a note 'from the chairman' to mark the first of what we hope will be many such newsletters.

It is hard to define exactly what the *Hardy Orchid Society* is about other than to say it is a meeting of many and diverse interests which have as their focus terrestrial orchids - in particular those growing in Europe, although not exclusively as members have travelled elsewhere. Members of the society might be interested in the growing of terrestrial orchids, the vexed questions of their taxonomy, travel in search of orchids, the conservation of native orchids, photographing wild orchids and some of us even write about them. More often than not members of our society are interested in several, if not all of the aspects mentioned.

The membership embraces a wide spectrum of levels of interest in orchids from 'professionals' through keen amateurs to the novice all drawn together by a fascination with these bizarre plants. A feature of meetings which always delights me is the readiness with which knowledge and experience are shared. No-one wondering whether or not to join should ever feel they will be an 'outsider' ostracised by lack of knowledge. As far as orchids are concerned we are all frequently reminded of our degree of ignorance - not only do we not know the answers, we sometimes do not even recognise the questions.

It might come as a surprise to some that there is a very strong interest in **conservation** within the society. Not only are many of our members active in their local trusts but several with the expertise have advised trusts on the growing of orchids from seed. The question of replanting species is a vexed one and the idea of interfering with nature absolute anathema to some. It should never be done without a great deal of consultation. Sadly, the activities of humankind have pushed many populations to the brink of extinction - ideally, timely habitat management should provide the answer but, so often, one learns of the demise of plants too late. Perhaps the greatest crime is to do nothing - the expertise certainly exists within the society to propagate from seed of existing plant stock and any requests for help will be welcomed.

The success or otherwise of this publication depends on the readiness of members to go into print - to those who voice opinions and information at meetings then *put yer money where yer mouth is*, as it were. So . . . here is to a very productive future and an exhortation to anyone reading this who is not a member to come and join us.

Paul Harcourt Davies

NOTES FROM THE COMMITTEE

FROM THE NEWSLETTER SECRETARY

Welcome to our first Newsletter - hopefully the first of many! Many thanks to those members who have contributed so far - PLEASE keep on sending contributions. Even just a short note on a topic will be gratefully received. Please send them to me:-

Mrs Carol Dash, Newsletter Secretary
Lower Lakes
Suckley Knowle
Whitbourne Worcestershire WR6 5RM

I would like to point out that we can all learn from each other's mistakes as well successes, so don't be afraid to write in. Our intention is to have a section for your letters and comments, so if you have any please write.

The newsletter is still embryonic at this stage and will evolve and be shaped into whatever the Society wants it to be, so your thoughts or suggestions will always be welcome.

There will also be space for a wants/swaps/buy & sell section if anyone is interested.

I would like to point out that letters or articles may be shortened for publication and also that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the Society or the Newsletter Secretary.

The next issue is due out in early October, so please send anything for this issue to me by 1st September.

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

HELP!!

The AGM in Pershore saw major changes in the structure of the committee. Due to enforced retirements (because of the maximum-three-years-in-post rule, only two of the previous members remained in post) seven totally new members were elected. So please allow for the occasional error or omission whilst we are running ourselves in!

I intend to use this Newsletter to try out requests with which members might be able to help. Firstly, and most importantly, our Autumn meeting, which for the last two years has been so successfully held at the Greswolde Arms in Knowle, will have to find a new venue. We are no longer welcome at the GA and, although it was ideally situated for most members, it was not really a suitable establishment as we had little privacy in the open bar. So has anyone got a suggestion for a new location? We really do need a private room big enough to hold say 50 or so members, a buffet lunch capability, adequate parking, and a central situation such as we had in Knowle. There is some urgency in this: the meeting may be five months away but we really do need to establish a location as quickly as possible. At the moment we are following the general majority feeling expressed at the AGM that Saturdays are preferable to Sundays for our meetings: do you have any strong feelings on the subject?

Another request, following a letter from a member living in the wilds of Yorkshire, suggests that we might try a meeting in that area in addition to our established meetings, perhaps as part of an AGS show or in conjunction with another specialist plant society (the Saxifrage Society was mentioned as a possible example). Any ideas and offers of local help would be very welcome.

Lastly: are you happy with the existing type of meeting programme - two or three talks or slide shows, with a discussion forum on some aspect of culture? If not, please let me know, with suggestions for suitable alternatives. And of course, if you have any ideas for speakers you would like to hear, or if you have a talk you are willing to give yourself (give being the operative word!) please don't hesitate to let me know.

For those who were unable to attend the AGM, and those who slept through it, your committee for the coming year is as follows:

Chairman: Paul Harcourt Davies
Vice-chairman: vacant
Honorary Secretary: Richard Manuel
Honorary Treasurer: Christine Cook
Membership Secretary: Richard Nichol
Show Secretary: vacant (any volunteers?)
Assistant Show Secretary: Kath Dryden
Conservation Officer: Alan Dash
Newsletter Secretary: Carol Dash
Ordinary Members: Adrian Blundell, C. Hardwick.

Richard Manuel, *Hon. Sec.*, 45 Thorncliffe Road, Oxford, OX2 7BA

* * *

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

A reminder to those who have not yet paid their 1996 membership fees. These run from AGM to AGM (roughly May to May) and so are now due. Please note that Christine Cook is our new Treasurer and all monies should be sent to her:

Mrs Christine Cook
15 Weald Rise
Tilehurst
Reading
Berkshire RG30 6XB

The membership fees are as follows:

Single £6.00 per year
Double (Family) £9.00

Please note that this fee does NOT include Peter Bradbury's *Pleione Report* this year. This will be available from Norman Heywood at Orchid Sundries - more information at a later date.

LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS AT THE AGM

Carol Dash

For those of you who were unable to attend the annual general meeting on Saturday 18th May at Pershore the following is a brief resume of the lectures given there.

Following the AGM our Chairman, Paul Harcourt Davies, took us on a wonderfully illustrated visit to the natural rock garden of Gargano in southern Italy. The area has a very rich flora and orchids are particularly varied and plentiful. Many species of *Orchis* occur and in particular large stands of *O. italica* were very beautiful in the stony fields. Many different *Ophrys* and their hybrids were also seen including the lovely *O. bertoloniiiformis*. *O. sipontensis* is also present but in reduced numbers; this *Ophrys* is now endangered in the area due to cattle grazing. *O. papilionacea* var. *rubra*, and *O. morio* var. *picta*, were plentiful. The presence of their hybrid *Orchis x gennarii* was interesting as we had also seen a beautiful specimen exhibited in the show. Paul's slides were excellent, as ever, with shots of wild tulips (*T. australis*) carpeting the fields at Monte san Angelo. More information on future trips to be led by Paul Harcourt Davies will appear in later issues.

* * *

After lunch our visiting speaker Dr Peter Jones gave us a very interesting insight into his work on the conservation of the Fen Orchid (*Liparis loeselii* var. *ovata*) at Kenfig Burrows, south Wales.

The ovate-leaved form of this tiny green orchid only occurs in the western dune slacks of Britain, the type form being present in East Anglia, where many sites have been lost due to disturbances of peat cutting routines. Kew is at present working to help with recolonisation of these areas. The species as a whole is endangered and the ovate-leaved form is now restricted to only three sites (Kenfig, Crymlyn and Whiteford) all in south Wales. It is no longer present at Braunton or Oxwich as it is possibly too dry there now.

The plants are very difficult to find and many of them are single leaved and less than 15mm high. They live in very difficult environment with a wide ranging water table and danger from maurauding snails. Detailed study revealed populations were

declining at Kenfig. It was observed that the only new plants to be found were on fresh dune slacks with bare soil. The more established slacks became too thick with moss and although rich in other flora this was unsuitable for supporting and increasing the numbers of fen orchids. The dunes were in fact becoming too stable. As a result of these findings it was decided that rather drastic habitat management was called for. In selected areas all vegetation was cut off and removed at ground level. This was done in 1994 and by 1995 78 fen orchid plants were found in a 25m x 25m area which had previously held no plants at all. It is difficult to be sure whether these plants were in fact present, previously suppressed under the thick vegetation, or whether they have developed as new plants from seed in the freshly prepared habitat. This encouraging finding so soon after the habitat changes were made was excellent news. It is hoped that other plant species which also like the bare soil of newly formed dune slacks such as Shore Dock (*Rumex rupestris*) and a small liverwort called Petalwort, will also be encouraged and flourish. By the time you read this, some of our members will have visited the Burrows on the HOS trip; we hope to have a report on this in the next newsletter.

After coffee Kath Dryden gave a very honest and, as always, amusing talk on her successes and failures with *Cypripedium* culture over the last twelve months. On purchasing her small seedlings in November it was necessary to give the plants an enforced cold period, in the fridge, of at least three months (*Cyp. guttatum* probably 6 months!). This can be either in a small flask with perlite and a small amount of water, OR after being potted up into pots of growing medium. General discussion suggested that the former did better than the latter. Compost used was based on: 1 part Cambark 100; 1 part Cambark fine; Horticultural grade Charcoal and Super- coarse Perlite. Some experiments were carried out using Seramis and Cambark 100 and we hope to report on these findings at a later date. A grit collar on top of the growing medium seemed to help. The general feeling was that one should over pot the plants to give as constant a moisture and temperature level as possible. Kath discussed feeding, for which she has been using a 18:10:18 feed (plus trace elements) in rain water (quarter strength Peter's Excel formula).

In the discussion afterwards Richard Manuel put forward the method he has used successfully so far for *Cyp. californicum*. This involved placing the seedlings in a bed of washed perlite and live sphagnum moss in a sealed plastic lunch box with about 1cm of boiled rain water, and standing this in the fridge. Once there were green shoots visible the plants were potted up into a mix of perlite, sphagnum and leaf mould, and stood in 1cm of rainwater in a propagator, where they are now growing happily.

Kath felt that many of her failures occurred because of the cold Spring. On bringing the plants out of the fridge the temperature was not high enough outside to encourage them to grow away.

SEED AND FUNGUS BANK

The Society is hoping to establish a seed bank for members. Any donations of surplus orchid seed will be gratefully received. Please send fresh, dated seed, or seed that has been stored well. If in doubt about storage methods contact Adrian Blundell (below). Please make sure that seed is in sealed packets, preferably wrap seed in dry tissue paper first, seal and then packet to avoid cross contamination with seed of other species, which is obviously a risk when the seed is so fine. Seed should be from cultivated orchids, not from wild sources. Please send seed to:

Adrian Blundell 15 King Street, Cherry Orchard. Shrewsbury. Shropshire SY2 5ES.

We hope that a list of available seed will be published in a later newsletter. Member's response to this will obviously determine how much seed and what variety is available. Seed will then be available for a small charge (not yet decided) to cover postage and packing, plus a small levy for Society funds. An incentive scheme for donors is being considered (e.g. first choice of seed or more packets?). But as all growers are not necessarily sowers this may be difficult. Please let us have any suggestions you may have on this.

Adrian is also hoping to establish a fungus bank - watch this space! Costs would be slightly higher to cover bottles, agar and postage but never-the-less it will give members an opportunity to experiment with new fungal strains. More information will appear in later newsletters.

FIELD TRIP TO KENT, 2nd June 1996

Simon Tarrant

Following the successful field trip in Dorset last year I was asked if I could organise something similar on the eastern side of London. I soon realised that nothing could be achieved without the co-operation of the local Wildlife trust, and also that Kent held more promise than my home county of Essex.

A phone call to Pete Raine, the Director of the Kent Trust, produced a positive and enthusiastic response. He sent me details of the orchid-rich reserves of Kent and put me in touch with Mike Williams, the Hon. Warden at Lydden Temple Ewell Reserve. Between us we planned a date and an itinerary designed to make the most of whatever the season and the weather did to us. As the day approached my nervousness increased as it remained bitterly cold and dry in the Southeast.

Our first visit was to the Lydden Temple Ewell Reserve near Dover, and the sun was shining warmly on us. This is an extensive area of open chalk downland parts of which carry SSSI status because of its national importance for different butterflies. While several of our party were happy to be distracted by butterflies, our reason for being there was the early spider and burnt-tip orchids. The late season meant that the early spiders were just right for us, but the burnt-tips were just coming into bud. In a couple of weeks more commonplace orchids such as fragrant and pyramidal should be in flower here.

After a packed lunch at Lydden we travelled to Park Gate Down Reserve, another SSSI on the North Downs chalk, but surrounded by woodland, and with areas capped with clay. It decided to rain on us and the temperature dropped quite a bit, but I don't think anyone was downhearted. The most noticeable plants here are cowslips and early purple orchids, which should by rights be past their best in early June, but were still in full flower. But the undoubted stars of the reserve are the monkey orchids, and there were enough spikes flowering to allow the photographers among us to lie in the wet grass and soak up the excitement. There were also burnt-tip and fly orchids in flower - the fly orchids looking rather self-conscious stuck out in the open pasture. Twayblades and green-winged orchids were also flowering, but musk orchids as well as fragrant, bee, pyramidal, and greater butterfly orchids all require return trips over the next few weeks. The butterfly freaks had less to excite them in the rain, but those of us who function better in the twilight world of moths were very excited by the newly emerged small elephant hawk moth which Mike Williams found.

The rain was left at Park Gate Down, and our tour moved to Yocketts Bank, a west-facing woodland reserve over chalk and clay-with-flints. Top of the orchid list here is the lady orchid, and numerous flowering spikes were seen, in the peak of perfection. This plant is a personal favourite of mine, so I was especially delighted by the albino specimen with about thirty green and white flowers. There were also some fine fly orchids looking far more comfortable in a woodland setting, and a good number of twayblades including a sturdy three-leaved plant (is this a thrayblade?). A couple of common spotted orchids were starting into flower and a white helleborine's flowers were as open as they would ever be. Greater butterfly orchids were found in bud, and broad leaved helleborine held promise, for later in summer.

One of the attractions of a day like this, apart from the opportunity to see some very rare and wonderful plants, is the networking I had at the lakes place. Old acquaintanceships are renewed and new ones made. The day would not have been possible without the help of the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation and the dedication of Mike Williams.

HOS would like to thank Simon for his splendid efforts in organising this obviously very successful

GROWING ORCHIDS IN THE OPEN GARDEN

Mike Powell

I have written this article with beginners in mind. It describes the orchid species I have succeeded in growing outdoors in the garden and the methods I have used. I have been growing orchids in the open garden only for about five years, so I am not very experienced myself, but I have discovered that it is possible to grow a satisfying range of orchids. My garden is in Southampton, where it is relatively mild in winter, but it should be possible to grow orchids outdoors anywhere in the British Isles.

Before undertaking anything it is a good idea to read as much as you can about the subject, as you will then be able to form an idea of what it is possible for you to grow in your area. The best book on the subject is *Hardy Orchids - Orchids for the garden and frost-free glasshouse*, by Phillip Cribb and Christopher Bailes (Christopher Helm, London). This describes a wide variety of cold growing orchids, but the majority would not be suitable for a beginner, being either hard to acquire or presenting difficulties in culture. Expense is also a problem. Compared with the cost of most bulbs, orchids are expensive to buy and harder to grow well. It is easy to spend a considerable sum and have nothing to show for it at the end of the day. Knowing the easiest varieties to grow can save time, money, and disappointment.

Suitable, Orchids

The easiest species to grow come from the genera *Bletilla*, *Dactylorhiza*, and *Epipactis*. These orchids are relatively cheap and easy to buy, winter hardy, and reliable. *Bletilla* is a small genus of orchids from China and Japan. They produce attractive narrow pleated leaves from underground pseudobulbs. Over time they can build up into quite large colonies. One species is suitable for the garden:

Bletilla striata is the hardiest, easiest and cheapest of all garden-worthy orchids to acquire. It is available as dried divisions in most garden centres. If you are lucky you may find them offered in pots. If you do, don't hesitate - buy! The quite large flowers are produced on 30-45cm tall spikes of three to six, and sweetly scented. The most common colour is a strong magenta, but plants with white flowers are also available (var. *alba*) and also plants with variegated leaves and pale pink or

white flowers (var. *albostriata*). It likes a humus-rich neutral or alkaline soil in light shade or full sun, though I would recommend full sun as the plants flower better. It can be grown out of doors in a sunny sheltered spot in the south of Britain, though a protective mulch is needed. I use leafmould, or Mulch & Mix. Further north use a cloche or pane of glass as well. If in doubt, grow it in a pot as a patio plant or in a conservatory. The other species and hybrids are not hardy out of doors and are best grown in a greenhouse or conservatory.

Epipactis contains about 15 species, mainly in Europe but also across the northern hemisphere to the Far East and North America. Two species are suitable for the garden:

Epipactis gigantea, the Chatterbox Orchid, is an excellent vigorous orchid for the garden. In the wild it will grow up to 1m though in cultivation 25-50cms is more likely. It sends up shoots from a wandering underground rhizome. These consist of between 4 and 15 narrow, pleated, hairy leaves and up to 15 flowers, though 3 to 7 is more likely. The flowers are 25 - 30mm across, in a mixture of brown, yellow, green, and red. The effect is striking rather than showy. It likes a light, leafy moist soil in part shade or full sun. Given these conditions it is vigorous and spreads rapidly. It is a tolerant plant and very hardy. It is inexpensive to buy and becoming increasingly available.

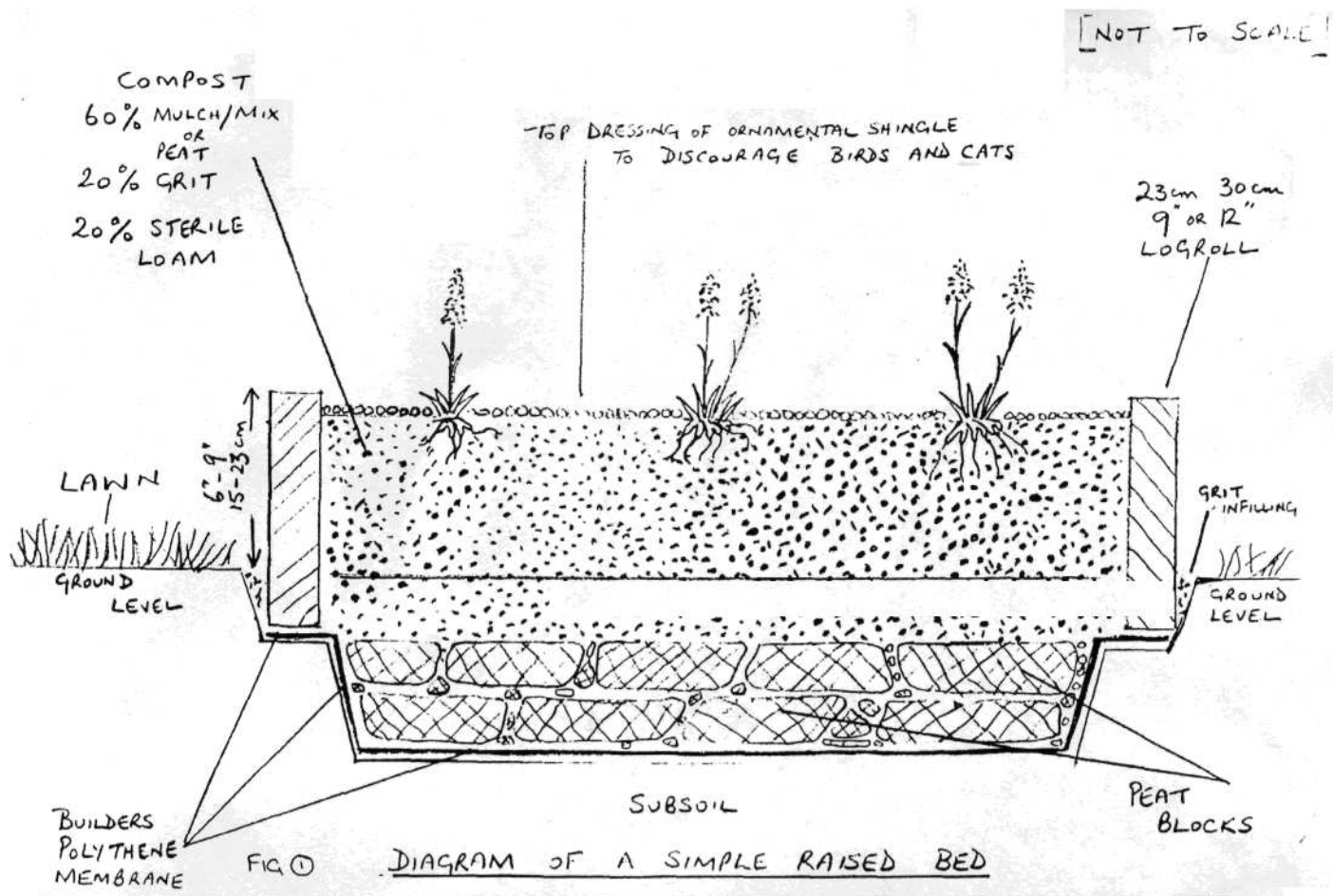
Epipactis palustris, the Marsh Helleborine, is native to this country. It has a similar growth habit to *E. gigantea* and can grow to 70cm, but 25-50cm is a more normal height. It thrives in a light, humus-rich, neutral to alkaline soil with ample moisture, as its name suggests. The flowers are about 20mm across, nodding, green or reddish purple, with a large white frilly lip. Given adequate moisture it is a reliable hardy species. It is not as widely available as *E. gigantea* but is not hard to acquire with a little persistence.

Dactylorhiza (the Marsh Orchids) is a complicated genus of about 24 species native to Europe and temperate Asia, with a single species in North America. Generally they dwell in damp and marshy places. They grow from a finger-shaped and divided tuber which provides reserves for one season's growth. During the current growing season the plant produces one or more replacement tubers for the next year, which lie dormant over the winter after the old tuber has rotted away. Unlike most tuberous orchids, dactylorhizas are capable of clumping up quite rapidly if they are happy. They are excellent garden orchids and widely available from mail order and specialist nurseries. In addition to the species there is a wide range of hybrids available and these are even better in the garden. They all appreciate a sharply drained soil, which is kept moist during growing season, and good light. A few species are described below.

D. elata and *D. foliosa* are two orchids that are horticulturally very similar, being large plants up to 70cm or more tall, with unspotted leaves and purple to magenta flowers.

D. praetermissa, the Southern Marsh orchid, is our largest native species. It is usually 30-50cm tall but may reach 80cm. It has unspotted leaves and pale purple flowers with a finely marked lip.

D. fuchsii, the Common Spotted orchid, is the commonest marsh orchid in this country and grows to about 35cm tall. It has boldly spotted leaves and pale pink flowers with a markedly three lobed lip. It will tolerate drier conditions in the garden than most marsh orchids and, like the foregoing, it prefers neutral to alkaline soil. It is generally easy and cheap to buy and is an excellent garden plant.



D. maculata (ericetorum), the Heath Spotted orchid, is common on acid soils in this country. It has narrow spotted leaves and pale pink flowers with light purple spots on the undivided lip. It is as easy to grow as its close relative *D. fuchsii*.

Dactylorhiza x Grandis is a hybrid between *D. praetermissa* and *D. maculata*. It is an attractive vigorous plant growing to 70cm tall at best, with pinkish purple flowers. It usually has spotted leaves. It is an excellent garden plant, buy it if you see it!

Composts

The important thing to remember about orchid composts is firstly that they should offer absolutely perfect drainage, and should not be too rich. Orchids are generally adapted to living in very poor soils, and too rich a soil will actually do them harm. It may even kill some species.

A formula for a good basic compost is as follows (after Cribb & Bailes):

- 3 parts heat-sterilised loam - it must be sterilised
- 3 parts grit or sand (6mm size)
- 2 parts beech or oak leafmould - sieved. Other leafmould would do at a pinch but oak and beech are best.
- 1 part composted pine bark, sieved to retain the particles 6mm across.
- 1 dessertspoon per 2 galls of Hoof and Horn (10ml per 10L).

Another mix which holds more moisture is as follows:

- 2 parts sterilised loam
- 2 parts leafmould as above
- 1 part fibrous peat - not milled peat
- 1 part grit
- Fertiliser as above

NOTE - Depth to which tub is sunk depends on drainage. In poorly drained soil, avoid sinking tub too deep i.e. keep it raised higher.

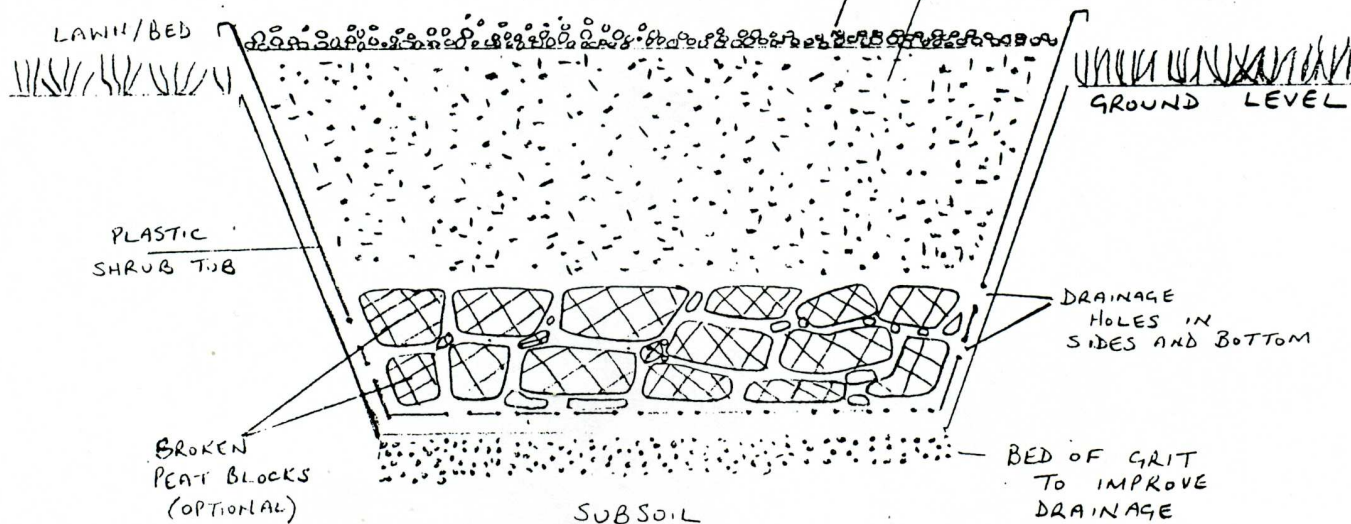
TOP DRESSING OF GRAVEL STOPS CATS/BLACKBIRDS

COMPOST

50% MULCH/MIX
50% GRIT

OR

60% PEAT
20% GRIT
20% STERILE LOAM



NOT TO SCALE] FIG 2 GROWING ORCHIDS IN A SUNKEN TUB.

Another simpler mix used by Norman Heywood consists of:

- 6 parts milled peat (60%)
- 2 parts sterilised loam (20%)
- 2 parts grit (20%)
- Small amount of slow release fertiliser

Finally, I have had reasonable success with dactylorhizas using 5 parts Mulch and Mix (peat substitute) and 5 parts grit.

All these ingredients should be easily obtained, except for the coarse peat; but if you are lucky you may find bags of peat walling blocks for sale and these can easily be crumbled and sieved and are very good. If you object to using peat on ecological grounds then Mulch and Mix is a perfectly acceptable substitute and may even be better as it is coarser and drains more freely.

Feeding

Orchids are particularly sensitive to artificial fertilisers. This is not to say they don't like fertilisers - they do, but in very weak doses. If using say, *Phostrogen*, it needs to be used at about quarter strength at most. Also it needs to be sprayed onto the leaves rather than watered on. 'Little and often' is a good rule. A very small amount of slow release fertiliser such as *Osmocote* is another way of administering fertiliser; but play safe: it is better to under-rather than overfeed. Perhaps the best way of feeding orchids is to buy a proprietary orchid fertiliser and follow the instructions. *Orchidquick* is a good make.

{Some text is missing from all known copies of the first edition.}

wide. I lined this with heavy duty builder's membrane and filled it with block peat to ground level. Then I surrounded the hole with 30cm (12") logroll sunk 3" into the ground and filled it with Norman's compost mix plus crumbled remains of peat block - see Fig 1. The idea was to create a free-draining but moisture retentive soil with a zone of permanent saturation. This would encourage orchid roots to grow downwards and provide a constant reservoir of moisture in drier weather. To date it seems to be working. I have planted this with a variety of *Dactylorhiza* and *Epipactis gigantea* and *palustris*. Last year my three plants of *E. gigantea* produced over 50 flowering spikes and most of my dactylorhizas are starting to clump up. I haven't tried it with any tuberous terrestrials apart from dactylorhizas as it would probably be too damp, but by leaving out the peat blocks and substituting a layer of chalk rubble or limestone chips and using a basic terrestrial mix it should be possible to produce a suitable raised bed for chalk loving terrestrials.

A cheaper alternative to making a raised bed would be to sink a large shrub tub into the ground, having first ensured proper drainage by drilling holes, and grow your orchids in that, using a suitable compost - see Fig. 2. That is what I did before I made my raised bed and it worked with *Epipactis* and *Dactylorhiza*. Just make sure drainage is first rate by standing the tub on a bed of grit. Unless you garden on thick clay this should work quite well, but you should experiment to get the correct set up for your area.

I do not claim to be an expert on growing orchids. All I have tried to do is to share my experiences and successes to date with others, and show that growing orchids in the garden is not difficult if a few simple rules are followed and some common sense is used. More experienced and knowledgeable growers may know better ways, and I would be glad of constructive criticism and comments. I wish you the best of luck.

Appendix - Useful Nurseries:

Jaques Amand Ltd, The Nurseries, Clamp Hill, Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 3JS.

Paul Christian, P.O. Box 468, Wrexham Clwyd LL13 9XR.

Hardy Orchids Ltd, New Gate Farm, Scotchey Lane, Stour Provost, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 5LT.

GROWERS DIARY

A Year of Tuberous Terrestrial Orchid Culture. Part 1. By Alan Dash

Briefly, by way of introduction, I have a mixed collection of all sorts of orchids, aided and abetted by various seed-raising friends and trade orchid nurseries. Facilities acquired over the years include:

One garden - heavy alkaline clay soil in Worcestershire,

One greenhouse - wooden 10'x8' with sand-plunge beds, thermostatically controlled fan heater, and fan,

A 'Wardian type' growing case - designed to display tropical orchids in the house,

A 'glove box' type sowing arrangement,

A series of shelves with strip lights above for growing on seedlings in flask.

End of July 1995

Spiranthes spiralis in flower well ahead of wild specimens (seems to be the case with most of the specimens I grow). This orchid has formed a sizeable clump of four or five leaf rosettes together and must form more than one tuber per year. I do like to

repot these terrestrial orchids each year but it baffles me at what time of year to repot this one; it seems to be in leaf all summer but just as the leaves are dying away and one would normally repot - up pop the flower spikes! Then by the time the flower spikes are over it appears to be into next years growth. I guess the right time would be late summer but I wouldn't like to disturb it when it is flowering. Mediterranean type orchids have been in their pots from last winter stored in the attic room all summer with no water at all. Totally dry! Despite this seemingly harsh regime there appear to have been no casualties except one pot of *Pterostylis* seedlings which had no recognisable tubers. Some tubers are already beginning to sprout including *Orchis italica*, *Serapias vomeracea*, and *Orchis papilionacea*. On this basis the whole lot were repotted in late July/early August.

The potting compost used comprises roughly equal parts John Innes 2 and good quality sharp grit. Large deep pots were used. For example the largest tuber -*Barlia robertiana* (an oval tuber some 2.5" long) - was potted into a plastic pot 7" diameter and 8.5" high. The tuber was placed in about the centre of the volume of the pots and the top 2" of the pot filled with free draining grit. The smallest tubers, e.g. *Serapias parviflora*, go into smaller pots - 2.5" - 3.5" - but I do try to acquire long pots, i.e. at least 5" deep. This adds volume to the compost, helping stabilise root conditions and also goes some way to avoiding the problem of rooting into the sand plunge. The weather is dry and the pots are placed outside and left unwatered.

August 1995

Dactylorhizas have finished flowering some weeks ago and look strong plants, some having 2 or 3 spikes in a pot. I cannot decide from the books the best time to split up the plants but can't resist tipping them out now. The tubers have multiplied well and it is possible to identify new finger-like tubers which have already started into growth for next year. These are carefully split away and potted up, 4 or 5 plants are made from single spikes that were purchased at the AGM in May 1994. Enough to try some in the garden for the first time!

Dactylorhiza compost is roughly equal parts soil-based compost, peat-based compost, and grit.

Late August also sees the first rain here for over 6 weeks. Many of the mediterranean type orchids begin to show their shoots above the grit.

September 1995

Proper rain! The orchids are brought into the greenhouse and plunged in sand. The plunge is kept moist and the pots are watered about once a week from above. The greenhouse shading is removed. On warm, mild days the rosettes are sprayed with very weak seaweed fertiliser.

Mid-September I am given flasks of *Orchis morio*, *Dactylorhiza elata*, *D. purpurella*, *D. praetermissa*, and *Ophrys apifera* (generous friends!). These are transplanted into J12 and sand mix of approximately 1 : 3. The *Orchis* and *Dactylorhiza* are in flask with mycorrhizal fungus and subsequently wean successfully. The *O. apifera* are in sterile agar and subsequently fail (I think there is a lesson here).

The weather during September and October 1995 is exceptionally good for growth - very mild with bright light. Although the greenhouse shading was removed the sunlight is diffused by internally fixed bubble-wrap plastic which is in place all year round.

Cypripedium pubescens removed from the plunge in the greenhouse and placed outside to take advantage of falling night temperatures. Considering placing it in a spare fridge in the cellar to vernalise. I am afraid I'm one of those people who can't resist a poke below soil level and to my satisfaction I see next year's shoot looking healthy below.

Nothing in flower at this time of year by way of hardy orchids but I can recommend a South African terrestrial which makes a magnificent display in the autumn. *Stenoglottis longifolia* with its elegant spikes of 50 or so small pink to magenta flowers seems to be easy to grow on a window sill in the house and might grow well in the frost-free greenhouse - I haven't tried it yet.

ORCHID HUNTING IN MALLORCA

Carol & Alan Dash

This short article is by no means a full resume of the orchid potential of Mallorca. We felt, however, that something along these lines would have been helpful to us and therefore hope this can be of use and interest to others. Especially if one is limited to a short visit (ours was 10 days at the end of March/ early April 1994) it can be helpful to know a few sites to aim for.

A brief note about maps: We found the *Cartografia Militar de Espana* 1:50,000 series the most useful although not entirely accurate in places. Several may be needed to cover the desired areas but this is well worthwhile. The areas visited and mentioned in this article can be found on maps 670 (Soller), 671 (Inca) and 643/644 (Pollensa). A sheet for further east (Arta) would also be useful.

On hearing just prior to our departure that Mallorca was Britain's number one most popular foreign holiday destination for package holidays in 1994 we were aghast --was this really our scene? However, it is possible to get off the beaten track and avoid the worst of the tourist trade. Our base was a small cottage just outside Llubi in the centre of the island, near Inca (details at end of article). This area turned out to be a haven for orchid lovers. A series of low limestone ridges runs roughly NE-SW between Llubi and Santa Margarita - these are very interesting. The area is a maze of tracks and lanes and to describe a particular site would be impossible. However it is very pleasant walking to meander around the Suan and Ca'n Burguet areas. Orchids abound at the feet of the walls and in the less cultivated fields around. Carpets of *Ophrys bombyliflora* can be seen plus many spikes of *Ophrys tenthredinifera* - the latter seeming to prefer the relatively shadier positions. *Ophrys speculum* are also common as is *Serapias parviflora*. Large stands of the robust *Barlia robertiana* can be found in some areas but were mostly going over at the time of our visit. *Clematis cirrhosa*, again an early flowerer, can be seen scrambling through many of the stone walls. *Allium roseum* is a common roadside plant and a few *A. neapolitanum* were also to be found. Carpets of Tassel Hyacinths *Muscari comosum* colour the fields in the shade of Almond trees.

A few spikes of *Orchis italica* can be found but a far better location for this impressive orchid is on the Inca to Llubi road. Just outside Llubi take the turning to the left at the Torrent de Viviagrelles (just before the no overtaking signs) and double back on yourself. The orchids can be seen on your left all along the bank of the main road, but below the line of vision when you are on the road. *Ophrys tenthredinifera* can also be seen at this site.

Moving further afield and travelling from Santa Margarita towards Ca'n Picafort take the link road to the Arta road. This short cut passes from agricultural land upwards and into scrub and woodland. At the entry to this rougher terrain *Limodorum abortivum* can be seen by the roadside on the left. This beautiful orchid grows predominantly under pines and can be seen as dark purple spikes protruding through the pine mould. In our experience it is later flowering than many of the other mediterranean terrestrial orchids and would probably be at its best later in April.

From here we continued and joined the main Arta road. About 4km along this passes between large areas of Cistus scrub on both sides of the road. These areas are worth investigating. About 1km further on are private pine woods on the right of the road with *Orchis italica* and *Ophrys fusca* visible from the road.

A popular site for birdwatchers is Albufera marsh behind Alcudia Bay. Eddie Watkinson does give some helpful hints to botanists in his *Guide to Birdwatching in Mallorca*. Whilst finding little of great interest along the footpaths through the marsh it is a pleasant walk and the frog serenade is enjoyable. The pines appear as oases for orchid growth with *Ophrys bombyliflora*, *O. speculum*, *O. lutea* and *Serapias parviflora* being found. Also a solitary and rather dejected spike of *Orchis lactea* was discovered. *Orchis coriophora* were plentiful but still tightly in bud during our visit. A few spikes of *Orchis laxiflora* ssp. *palustris* can be found after patient searching along the path sides back through the marsh towards the road. These beautiful orchids were only just opening at the time of our visit, a few weeks later and they would have been easier to see.

The woods between the marsh and the sea are worth a short detour with *Ophrys tenthredinifera* and *O. fusca* present but not plentiful.

The mountainous north of the island is well worth visiting. The scenery is impressive with rugged mountains and brilliantly engineered roads. A visit to Fomentor (along with several thousand tourists!) we found spectacular only for the scenery. The mixed woods along the peninsula we found surprisingly poor for orchids. *Erodium chamaedryoides* grows well on the steep cliffs by the roadside just before the tunnel above Cala Figuera.

Cyclamen balearicum with its beautifully marked and marbled leaves is plentiful in the rocks and rugged woodland throughout the mountains. It can easily be seen from the road and on first glance appears small and insignificant. On closer inspection however the white flower is beautifully veined, flushed with pink and sweetly scented. Much of this area is heavily grazed by sheep and goats – indeed this is true of much of Mallorca.

Travelling along the Pollensa road towards Soller a series of reservoirs is encountered. The Embalse de Cuber can be easily walked around. Little can survive the heavy grazing (*Convolvulus siculus* is a tiny pretty exception). At the far side below the dam however, a scramble over rocks will reveal some healthy spikes of *Orchis mascula* clinging to rock faces well out of biting and photographing range. The next reservoir is much smaller and enclosed by sturdy fencing. It is well worth parking just before the tunnel. The fence keeps out the grazers and is meant to keep out the visitors - this is a military area. Within the boundaries of the fence are superb stands of *Orchis longicornu* on the bank below the dam. These beautiful orchids range in colour from a dark purple velvet through to a striking red. Also close by are some large spikes of *Ophrys tenthredinifera* for good measure. A descent from Soller towards the centre of the island is a seemingly never ending series of hairpin bends - watch out for tourist buses and bicycles on the wrong side of the road!

The detour through Bunyola to Orient and on to Alaro is well worth making. This is less touristy than many routes but no less picturesque. After passing through Orient with its orchards, the roadside bank to the right is of interest. *Ophrys fusca* is present with many *Orchis longicornu* interspersed with *O. mascula* and also *O. mascula olbiensis*. The spikes of the latter identified by their pale long-spurred flowers in small numbers per spike. *Serapias* is also present on the banking.

Ophrys bertolonii is another beautiful orchid well worth looking for. We found it plentiful near the Hermitage de Betlem, near Arta. From Arta it is worth taking the narrow road towards the Hermitage but at the fork turn right (left to Hermitage), carry on to another fork and this time bear left. This is a dead end but the *Cyclamen balearicum* and *Ophrys bertolonii* are plentiful, with other orchids also numerous.

Another orchid-rich location is found just as the Santa Margarita/Santa Magdalida road joins the main Alcudia to Arta road. The main road goes over a viaduct spanning the large wide valley. Just before the minor road meets this main road there is a gate on the right hand side of the road. Pull in here and go over the gate. Walk down through the small copse to the valley bottom ' below the main road.

Magnificent stands of *Orchis italica* can be found plus *Ophrys bertolonii*, *O. speculum*, *O. bombyliflora*, *O. tenthredinifera*, and *Barlia robertiana*. On our visit the valley had a deserted magical feel - it was ungrazed and unspoilt. I hope it stays that way!

Just a note about our accommodation: We stayed at Ca'n Juantia, San Burget, near Llubí. This is a small two bedroomed country cottage set in 2 acres of land. The accommodation is basic but adequate. The peacefulness of the cottage and its terrace - with magnificent views of the mountains and fantastic sunsets are really totally different from the mallorca of the tourist brochures. The cottage is quite isolated and though there are others not far away it was very quiet. As long as you don't mind sharing your shower with a gecko or two and being woken by the sheep's bells.... Further information from Mrs J. Rutherford, Knoll Hill House, Ampleforth, Yorks YO6 4DU (01439 8172). By the way, there are at least 5 different orchids in the garden of the cottage!

LETTERS AND COMMENTS

Orchids in the Press

On 22nd May a national newspaper ran a piece wittily entitled "Cricketers put orchid in covers as play goes on", about a colony of green winged orchids which had spontaneously appeared on a cricket ground in Sussex. This included such hitherto unknown facts on wild orchids such as: "*We have sought expert advice but we have been told it would be impossible to move the orchid without killing it*", "*Apparently the roots travel 30 feet away searching for food*". And "*The flower, a protected species and one of only 13 known to have grown in Britain this year...*" (Whatever that means!). "*It is positioned at short mid wicket to the pavilion*" (not in the mainstream of orchid lore, but still only true for less than half the time, unless they reposition themselves at the end of each over - think about it!). Various other inanities follow, including "*the ground staffs biggest worry -that if the orchid survives the next fortnight it could spawn (sic) and produce other blooms in need of protection all over the outfield*".

Some of this remarkable information, none of which is particularly true, was apparently supplied by English Nature; and the reporter, not surprisingly, neglected to identify himself. Perhaps if he had consulted the HOS (the real experts) he might have got a few things right! And which irresponsible and sensationalist national rag produced this rubbish? None other than The Daily Telegraph.

RM

WESTWOOD
★ NURSERY ★

ALPINE HOUSE & GARDEN ORCHIDS

65 YORKLAND AVENUE, WELLING,
KENT, DA16 2LE

M A I L O R D E R O N L Y

We have the best selection of terrestrial orchids
available including; Bletillas, Cypripediums, Cymbidium
goeringii, Dactylorhizas ,
Disas, Himantoglossum,
Ophrys, Orchis, Serapias, Pleiones
& Australian Terrestrial Orchids
+ many, many more.

S.A.E. for list please.

Note to contributors: Please supply clearly legible text, in ink if hand written, printing any words which may be misunderstood by a simple typist. If you have a word-processor it would help production if you are able to supply copy on disc. (saved as word for Mac if possible, but we can probably handle most other formats except Amstrad; but please send a paper copy as well! Discs will be returned. Since the newsletter has to be reproduced by photocopying, any diagrams and drawing should be drawn to a good size in black ink with good clear lines (no half-tones or pencil lines); please write any captions large and clear as we will probably reduce the size for printing. Finally, if any member has the technology and willingness to word-process the final copy for reproduction, please let us know. A committee member is doing this at present to help get the newsletter started but does not have the time to make it a permanent job.