

Cymbidium Chatter



Cym. (Lunakira X Laramie Joy 'Kierra')

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Latest News

Welcome to the June issue of *Cymbidium Chatter*. Last month's meeting of the COSV was the first to feature flowering plants for the year and a few photos are included on the next page.

Weegie Caughlan has kindly provided a detailed article on starting backbulbs, after reading my short piece in the previous issue. She has collated a number of different approaches from various growers in the US into a single reference.

Sadly, OrchidWiz (<https://www.orchidwiz.com/>) is shutting down at the end of the year. OrchidWiz X9.1 will be the last release of this extensive reference program and is due out 1st Dec 2022. For those submitting photos for inclusion in OrchidWiz, the 30th of June 2022 will be the last day that images will be accepted.

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Two selections of Cym. erythrostylum were exhibited – 'Magnificum' on the left and a selfing of 'Blumen Insel' (an alba) on the right.



Cym. Where's Wally 'Brooke', a 1995 registration from Guest Orchids, also made an appearance. It is the result of Jessie Blakiston X Valley Chestnut.

Plant Profile: Atlantic Carat 'No. 1'

Over the last couple of years, Atlantic Carat 'No. 1' has become a popular plant. It was a COCSA Flower of Year Finalist in 2020 and Grand Champion at the COCSA Spring Show in 2021 (grown and exhibited by John Moon). This vigorous, brown standard Cymbidium was hybridised by Guest Orchids and is the result of the pairing of Atlantic Crossing (a Featherhill hybrid) with Eight Carat (one of Guest's own hybrids). It is predominantly let down by its large bulbs and upright foliage, which results in the base of spike being down in the foliage.

Zelimir Basic, who operates a cut flower and pot plant nursery in Western Australia, purchased a piece of the original over five years ago and had it shipped directly to Moss Bray for cloning. Unfortunately, Moss fell ill after initiating the



The foliage is coarse and upright, as shown in this photo courtesy of Graham Morris.



Bloom photo courtesy of Graham Morris.



Cym. Atlantic Crossing 'Featherhill' HCC/AOS

cloning process, so Zel arranged for the mother flasks to be sent to Kevin Western for replating. Kevin proceeded to produce thousands of plantlets for Zel and distributed additional plants as well.

Zel flowered the first of his clones last year and crossed it with Harbour City 'Sydney', a pastel orange standard Cym that has taller spikes. He aims to improve the spike/foliage situation whilst keeping strong colour. Many of his clones are now in spike and Zel will be selling the flowers to florists this year, as he has observed that the darker colours are currently very popular – strong browns and oranges are selling out quicker than the pinks at present, with yellow the

least popular. As a cut flower plant, the shortcomings of the foliage are not as critical for Zel.

Moss Bray has also used the plant in hybridising, crossing it with Foxfire Amber 'Dural'. The first seedlings may flower this year. Unfortunately, the original piece held by Moss has been lost, probably during his illness.

Graham Morris has observed that it may be prone to rot under the right circumstances, as he reports Jong's Nursery has had problems with the plant. However, this may be a result of the cold conditions at Jong's, as Zel has not had any issues whatsoever with rot and found that it grows and flowers well.

The cross was registered in 2020 by Geoff Le Marne (with permission from Graham Guest), as Geoff is planning to use it in hybridising. Guest Orchids have progressed with other progeny from Eight Carat instead and posted one of their results on Facebook back in August 2021 (shown right).



A third-generation hybrid from Cym. Eight Carat. Photo courtesy of Graham Guest.

Comments on the Colour Brown

Let's talk about colour for a moment – specifically, brown. Brown is an interesting and unusual colour in that, depending on how you look at it (pun intended), it doesn't really exist. Consider the colours of the rainbow, or the light from a prism – light from the sun is split into the entire visible spectrum and brown is not there! Technically speaking, there is no such thing as brown light (which makes creating the colour on your computer and TV screens an interesting task – for the tech enthusiasts amongst the readership, there is a good video on the subject at <https://youtu.be/wh4aWZRtTwU>).

Brown can be thought of as the colour orange with low luminance and/or saturation, or alternatively as orange mixed with grey (some shades of brown can even be classified as just dark orange). The perception of orange vs. brown is also highly dependent on context – you will perceive the same colour differently depending on what colours surround it (especially how bright or dark they are). You can find several [optical illusions](#) online that highlight how the same colour appears as orange in one context and brown in another.

When it comes to Cymbidiums, we are dealing with pigments rather than a light source and it can get even more complicated. The same flower can appear brown or orange depending on lighting conditions and the position of the light source – is the light reflecting off the face of the flower, or shining through it? For this reason, producing a Cymbidium that is consistently perceived as orange can be a challenge.

More of TeePee's Treasures

I am still working through the multitude of photos Terry sent me from his 2021 flowering season! These are the last of the unregistered crosses and most likely to be new to some readers. First up is a selection of green standards.



Left: *Cym.* (Foxfire Emerald 'True Beauty' X Green Dream 'Standing Ovation')
Right: *Cym.* (Green Spectacle X Daintree) 'Tee Pee 07'



Left: *Cym.* (Green Elation X Kimberley Valley) 'Green Two'
Right: *Cym.* (Allumination X (Miretta X Ruth Hastings)) 'Trusting'

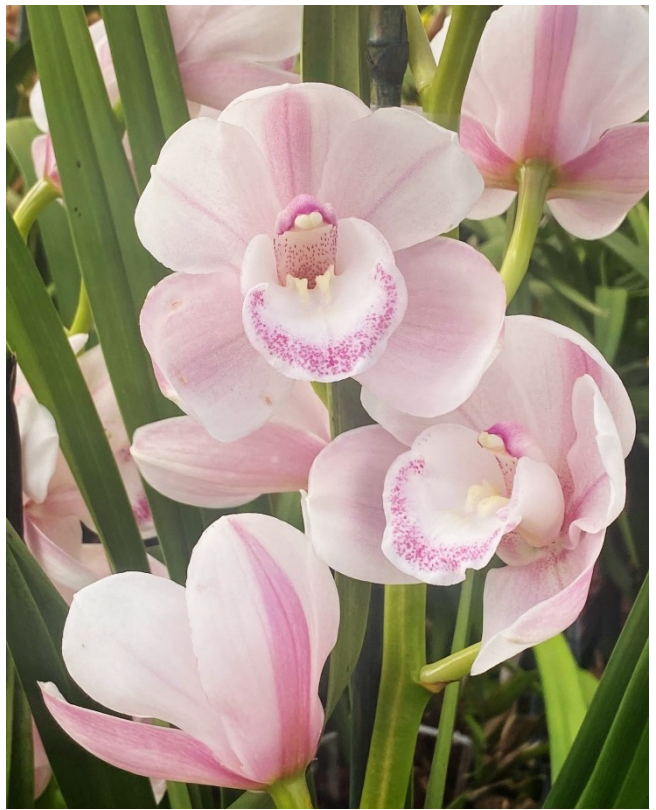
Next up are a selection of pinks. Terry's hybrid Cym. Laramie Lady 'Strawberry Fields' (reg. 2014) is included for comparison, as is its pod parent Kimberley Lady.



Left: Cym. (Kimberley Lady X Kirby Lesh) 'Small World'
Right: Cym. Laramie Lady 'Strawberry Fields'



Left: Cym. Kimberley Lady 'Tee Pee'
Right: Cym. (Red Valley X (Panther Mountain X Alexander Rose)) 'Red World'



Left: *Cym.* (Jill Rodder 'Peats Ridge' X Kabuki Moon 'Royale')
Right: *Cym.* Barrita Mushy 'Soft Pink' (registered Nov. 2020)

Last but not least is a clean white and a light brown from Alvin Bryant's Lunakira crossed with Terry's own Laramie Joy (reg. 2015).



Left: *Cym.* (Maclure's Quest 'Starquest' X Zenera 'Tee Pee')
Right: *Cym.* (Lunakira X Laramie Joy 'Kierra')

First Flowering Seedlings of 2021 by The 3 Amigos

3 Amigos Orchids are located in Adelaide, South Australia. We were very fortunate that in 2021 we were able to attend all our local Orchid shows. Each year we grow many of our own crosses, but also purchase flasks and plants from leading hybridizers.

We have always had an emphasizes on growing a good selection of seedlings that we can use for the show bench and improving on our current selections. 2021 was good for us and we were able to select several plants for further evaluation.

We have selected 5 of our favourites to share.

Seedling 1 is a beautiful baby pink miniature. Its first flowering is on a very small plant, and it won champion seedling and champion miniature at the Cymbidium Orchid Club of South Australia Spring show. It then went on to win the Cymbidium Orchid Club of SA seedling of the year.

Seedling 2 – a bright Granny Smith green standard. We have not shown this one yet, but its second flowering has produced 2 spikes per bulb. We look forward to seeing it again this year.



*Seedling 1: Templestowe's Charm 'Aidan' X Sims Vision
'Barcelona'*



*Seedling 2: Paradise Island 'Emerald' X
(Kimberley Valley x Albryant)*

Seedling 3 – this flower glows like a Balinese sunset. We exhibited this one at the Cymbidium Orchid Club Winter Show where it won champion small standard and champion seedling.

Seedling 4 – a nice pink on a well-spaced spike. It won the orchid of the night at the Cymbidium Orchid Club of SA Port Adelaide display.

Seedling 5 is a stunning non-staining green intermediate. We look forward to exhibiting it again this year.

3 Amigos Orchids puts a selection of first flowering seedlings on our Facebook page and invites you to join and enjoy our seedlings with us.

Thank you

3 Amigos Orchids



*Seedling 3: Golden Prize 'Thi Thi'
(Golden Fox X Prized 'Symbol')*



*Seedling 4: Blazing Dragon 'Magic'
(Anna Dragon 'Wow' X Blazing Fury)*



*Seedling 5: Touch of Green
'Sublime'
(Gentle Touch 'Bon Bon' X Green
Spectacle 'Shah')*

The Lowly Cymbidium Backbulb by Weegie Caughlan

Before the days of meristemming, the only two ways for a collector to obtain a division of a prized Cymbidium plant was by an actual splitting of the plant or proliferating growths from the pseudobulbs or backbulbs, as they are commonly called today.

Definitions

First it is necessary to define the terms used in this article.

Bulb: Technically, orchids do not have true bulbs, which are described as thickened, fleshy plant buds (usually formed under the surface of the soil) that carry the plant over from one blooming season to another, and when mature, send up the flowers from the apex of the bulb. A true bulb can – and most often does – grow and bloom by itself, such as daffodils and tulips.

Pseudobulb: Many orchids, including Cymbidiums, have pseudobulbs, which are thickened, bulblike, fleshy stems located above the ground that provide nutrients and water to the leaves and the plant in general. This article will refer to 1) green bulbs, which are actually pseudobulbs still carrying green leaves, and 2) backbulbs, those pseudobulbs having lost their green leaves but which are still plump and storing food supplies.

It may take three or more years to get blooms from a backbulb, but the reward for the patience and saving in costs as compared to buying a large and perhaps unobtainable division otherwise of the same plant are truly worth the effort.

There are as many ways of starting backbulbs as there are ways of fertilizing. As the old orchid saying goes, "Ask ten growers how they grow their plants and you will get twelve different answers!" and

so it goes with starting backbulbs. Several years ago, there was a thread started on an online forum regarding the different ways growers started their backbulbs. In some cases, as with most forums, only the first name of the forum poster was used.

Method #1

This has been used by the author in the San Francisco Bay area for many years with a 90% success rate.

1. Remove the backbulb from the plant (best done when it is out of the pot) and carefully clean it of all dead lower bracts. Be careful not to damage any emerging eyes, which occur along the side of the backbulb. Place in a clean pot with a label in the shade and allow it to dry for up to several days.
2. Place approximately one cup of your usual moistened orchid mix in a 1-quart (approx. 1L) Ziploc freezer bag.
3. Place up to two backbulbs from the same plant upright in the bag and buried about 1/3 to 1/2 deep.



Backbulb with eye

4. Insert the label with the potting date on the back of the tag into bag or write all the information of the plant name and date potted on the bag itself with an indelible (permanent) marker.
5. Seal the bag and place it in an upright position in a warm, well-lit place but not in direct sun.



Sealed in Ziploc bag

New growth developing

6. When new growth reaches the top of the bag (which may take up to a year or more), carefully remove the backbulb with the new growth and roots attached and place in a 3" (or slightly larger if necessary) pot, using the mix from the bag and adding more as necessary.
7. Place outside with other pots the same size to allow for more frequent watering of the smaller size pots. Using nursery flats for the smaller pots reduces the tendency for them to fall over.

Author's comment: I have noticed that by adding bark or my potting mix of choice and keeping the temperature above 65-70°F (18-21°C) as a low, mould and rot does not tend to occur. I am surprised that the bulbs can stand as warm a temperature as they do in my attic lit with skylights. It can get to 90°F (32°C) and not drop below 75°F (24°C) for several months during the summer.

I have definitely found that the backbulbs taken early have a much better chance of surviving and are much stronger. I have noticed also that the ones that start early in the summer with the benefit of warmer temperatures, start the leaf growth first. The ones that start late in the fall, start the root growth first. This does not always happen, but it does occur with enough frequency to be noticeable.

Method #2

This approach comes from Greg in Southern California:

Although it may take a few years from backbulbs to flowers, the sense of accomplishment truly pays off for the patience invested. I have experienced about a 60-75% success rate (which I am told is pretty good) in propagating backbulbs using this method:

1. After separating the backbulb from the parent plant and removing the old bracts, set it aside for a few days to allow the fresh cut to dry out a bit.
2. Plant the backbulb into just plain fine grade fir bark that has been soaked overnight. I will plant one to four backbulbs per four-inch pot. As with any Cymbidium, do not use a pot that is too big. I set the backbulb into the bark so that about 1/4 of the bulb is in the bark, 3/4 out of the bark. Keep these backbulbs in a protected area with less light than mature Cymbidiums need and a bit more warmth, too. They need to be kept moist, but not wet. If I don't get any growth in six months, they go to the compost heap.

I did do an experiment treating about 15 backbulbs with Rootone, a rooting hormone, and 15 of the same varieties without. I had the same success rate in each group – 10 in each sprouted. Rooting hormones are not effective because the backbulb sprouts leaves first in my experience, not roots (which develop later). Rootone also contains an antifungal agent, which I thought would help prevent rot, but apparently, it did not matter in my experiment.



Growth with roots

Bloom spike (note bulge)

Method #3

Not so much a method as some observations from Loren Batchman of Casa de las Orquideas in Solana Beach, California:

- I have tried sprouting backbulbs in both sealed and open plastic bags and have had a lot of them develop a white mould and then rot out where my nursery is located along the coast. Drying them out didn't seem to make much difference. The backbulbs seem to sweat so much in the bags even though the day/night temperature differential is only 5-10 degrees. However, no mix was put in the bags, just the backbulbs.
- Another observation on backbulbs: Those taken from plants divided early in the year seem to sprout much faster and better than those taken late in the year. When repotting occurred in August and September only about 15% of the backbulbs sprouted. When repotting started in

June, the success ratio was more like 50-75%. I have no data to confirm if starting the backbulbs in the spring would have an even higher success rate.



Ready to be potted up



Potted up with label and date

Method #4

This method is from Jim in San Jose, California.

- I've tried most of the methods mentioned already, but lately what I've been doing is writing a new name tag and taping it to the backbulb then tossing it into a large pot under my potting bench. I do not save many backbulbs, but for the few that I want to save, this is what I've been doing the past couple of years. Since they have little or no moisture around them, the bulbs tend to shrivel as the new growths appear. When I eventually get around to potting up the backbulbs with growths, the bulbs usually (but not always) plump back up within 6 months.
- The ones which do not produce any new growths get tossed into the trash bin. One of the drawbacks to this method is that in some cases the re-plumping of the backbulb can cause a delay in the maturation of the growth(s).
- One other point: I first check any backbulbs I plan on saving for evidence of a growth eye and save only those which have one or more. This improves the probability of them producing a growth. Once these backbulbs have three or more mature pseudobulbs with green leaves, I break off the spent backbulb and toss it into the trash bin.

Author's comment: My only concern with this method of putting all the backbulbs in the same pot and putting it under the bench is the risk of spreading viruses when water from the benches washes through the pot. Cross contamination between the backbulbs themselves is also a consideration. If the backbulbs from each plant are placed in separate pots and water from the plants above does not get to them, then the risk of spreading any viruses is much reduced.

Method #5

This approach is from Matt, who formerly resided in Southern California:

While working at the Santa Barbara Orchid Estate years ago, I learned how they propagated their backbulbs and I have had success in following their procedures, more or less.

1. Each backbulb, or small cluster of bulbs, is placed into a 2.25" pot or the smallest it will fit into with potting mix (fine bark only). They are placed in a very shady location.
2. When the new growth appears and gets to a couple of inches, it is potted up into a 3.25" or 4.125" pot and placed in regular Cym. light levels. It stays in that pot until it is ready to be moved into a 6-inch pot.

My Dad and I did this in the past but had success in starting them in a 3.25" and then repotting as necessary. The area we put them had lower light than the mature plants.

Method #6

This method comes from Bob Harris of The Orchid People in Oahu, Hawaii:

1. For 32 years, I lived in Inverness, CA, where I grew my Cyms outdoors. The fog and general moisture were perfect for them, and I used a technique for sprouting backbulbs that I may have learned from Rod McClellan's classes or from Don Wimber, with whom I studied in Grad school in Oregon. It was to simply place the backbulbs dry in dry sphagnum in a paper bag and roll it up.
2. When I saw sprouts of about an inch in height, I potted them up in a suitable sized pot.

Several years ago, I moved to the Big Island and have had to adjust everything from fertilizer to media (it rains a lot where I live) to which creatures like it here. At first, I did my backbulbs as usual in paper bags with sphagnum moss. Worked great (in fact better than before), as it is warmer here. Then I got "educated" and tried all sorts of new things since everyone here is an "orchid expert". The Ziploc only caused rot in a lot of the backbulbs here. Even though it is warm, rot just is vigorous here. So, I went back to the tried and true. I'd say my success varies between 60% and 80%.

My advice is to adjust your method according to where you live and what the ambient conditions are. If it is very humid, then take advantage of that factor. I repot them into a perlite and washed coconut husk medium with some diatomite in it (all large size) once I see white sprouts. I don't wait for it to grow big, as I can manage the material well in small pots in trays once they start sprouting.

Method #7

This is the first of two different approaches from Darrel in Castro Valley, California:

A Cymbidium backbulb is like a potato. Each has several 'eyes' to which a new sprout/growth can emerge. I have listed 2 methods below in which I have experienced 65-70% propagation success.

Before each method is described, preparation is pertinent. The parent plant from which the backbulb is separated from should be tested for CymMV/ORSV (*Editor: in Australia this should include OFV, as it is the second most common of the three*). There is no reason to propagate a backbulb that has virus. If the test result is negative, use a sterile, sharp knife/pruning shears to cleanly cut the rhizome off which connects the parent plant and backbulb. Remove all the old dead bracts and roots from the backbulb, then gently clean the backbulb using a toothbrush dipped in a solution of Physan 20. Be careful not to damage any emerging eyes! Sprinkle a little cinnamon on the cut.

Create a plant label with the grex/cultivar and date. The backbulb and label are then set aside in a shaded area for a couple of days to allow the fresh cut to heal. Continue with 2 optional methods of choice below:

Option #1: Place the backbulb and plant label upright into a sterile bag and seal it. Orchid mix is not added into the sealed bag to minimize mould and rot. The backbulb already stores adequate moisture. Place the bag indoors in a warm well-lit area, but not in direct sunlight. An LED light source is a good alternative. When the new growth has developed adequate roots, pot it up into a clean small pot with fine fir bark, perlite, and its plant label with the potting date. Provide morning sunlight/afternoon shade and lightly water weekly.

Option #2: Place the backbulb and plant label with potting date into a small pot with fine fir bark and perlite. Provided shade and lightly water weekly. When the new growth has developed adequate roots, provide morning sunlight/afternoon shade and lightly water weekly.

The backbulb is discarded if it develops mould, rot, or fails to push a new growth within 6 months. I have successfully flowered from a backbulb in 2 ½ years.

Method #8

This is the second approach from Darrel in Castro Valley, California. The above methods have all involved the propagation of the backbulb after it is removed from the plant, generally done at the time of the dividing and repotting of the original plant. This last method involves the propagation of a growth while the backbulb is still on the plant in the pot.

Option #1: An alternative method pertaining to propagating backbulbs is to allow either a backbulb or a green growth to initiate a new growth while still in the existing pot. When there are backbulbs in the main pot with the remainder of the plant, cut the backbulb's rhizome with a sterile tool. Success is 70%+ this way.



Growths on oldest backbulb whilst in pot



Backbulb and growths removed from pot

Option #2: Another choice is to take the oldest 'single' green leafed pseudobulb (roots still in good condition) while still in the pot (undisturbed) with the main plant and cut its rhizome from the main plant. Success of a new growth is 100%.



Backbulb propagation blooming at two and a half years



Backbulb propagation blooming at three and a half years

About the author: Weegie Caughlan is an accredited senior AOS judge and was a former CSA judge until the CSA disbanded. As a hobbyist, she has grown Cymbidiums for over 45 years. She won the Ernest Hetherington Award for outstanding Cymbidium awarded in 2013 for Cym Tower of Fire 'Sunset Flame' AM/AOS, B/CSA from her own cross. She has also taken many individual plant, display and AOS/CSA awards including an AQ on her cross of Cym. Hazel's Dragon in 2021. She lives in Los Altos, California.

Acknowledgements and Contributions

I hope you have enjoyed this issue. If you have any feedback or would like to contribute (whether it be just one or two photos, an idea for an article, or to volunteer for an interview), please get in touch! I can be reached at jwhite88@gmail.com.

Previous issues are available at <https://www.cosv.com.au/publications-and-resources>. All material is copyright © the original owners and used with permission. Thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue, including 3 Amigos Orchids, Zelimir Basic, Weegie Caughlan, Graham Guest, Geoff Le Marne, Graham Morris and Terry Poulton.

The next issue is planned for August 2022.