

SARCOCHILUS BREEDING

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The two articles in the last issue of *The Orchadian* (March, 1995) by David Banks and Frank Simpson on the breeding of *Sarcochilus* were illustrated by many photos of colourful plants. The articles and the photos showed that much progress has been made in producing new and colourful flowers. However to me it seems that little progress has been made in producing larger flowers in this genus. All the photos in the two articles are of quite small flowers and are markedly magnified in the reproductions.

Although a potful of *S. hartmannii* in full flower with many racemes open is very attractive, to me it would be much nicer if the individual flowers were at least twice as large. Even X2.5 would not seem to me to be out of proportion, so I am writing this letter to appeal to hybridisers to attempt to markedly enlarge the flowers of *Sarcochilus*.

I realise that to some growers such an appeal is akin to heresy but there are others to whom a larger flower would still appeal.

The largest well-shaped flowers I have seen have been on various clones of *S. Melba* and I have heard many comments such as: "Wow, look at that flower!" when such a plant is exhibited.

It seems to me that the breeding of *Sarconopsis* hybrids must have been with the object of enlarging the *Sarcochilus* flower and I am sure that if the former weren't so difficult to grow and breed they would be widely grown and appreciated. The "small labella" mentioned by David Banks would, I am sure, be rapidly bred out of the hybrids if they were less difficult to breed further.

The size of *S. fitzgeraldii* is being "improved" by using the cultivar "50 Center" and when the shape can be filled in, in another generation or so, a spectacular flower should

result. However, *S. hartmannii* breeding seems to have concentrated on shape to the exclusion of size as the more perfectly shaped flowers are usually smaller than the more open ones.

To achieve larger flowers and at the same time to retain reasonable shape, breeders should probably look to *S. Melba*, *S. Fitzhart*, *S. Melody* and the larger, newer "fitzgeraldii" clones. The larger "Melbas" have been bred from large flowered forms of *S. falcatus* so other "falcatus" hybrids of large size could be included. Some clones of these hybrids already have quite a bit of colour, so breeding for size should not lose colour or produce mainly white flowers. Simultaneous breeding of *S. Melba*, large *S. fitzgeraldii* and large *S. falcatus* clones with the colourful hybrids as illustrated in *The Orchadian* articles could produce larger coloured flowers to be incorporated in a breeding programme for larger flowers.

Although catalogues often suggest that a particular cross may produce "large, well shaped" flowers or the result should be "large and colourful" I have never seen one saying "line bred to produce larger flowers". We have line breeding to increase colour and to improve shape but not to increase size. Why not? I can envisage *Sarcochilus* flowers bred to resemble small *Phalaenopsis* with flowers 5-6cms which will grow cool and come in all kinds of colours.

Let's start to deliberately hybridise in this direction. Anyone who prefers the small dainty flowers of the present style of plants can obviously continue with this line but for others, bigger is beautiful too.

REFERENCES

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