

Book Review

Orchids (Revised Edition)

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124pp

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There is a wealth of books aimed at the orchidophile and the niches seem almost endless. This revised edition of *Orchids* (first published in 1988 by Hamlyn, a division of Octopus Press) is commendable in the wide range of topics it covers. The reader is briefed on the long history of orchid growing, on conservation issues and how these relate to orchids in the wild. There is no doubt that the central theme of the book is horticultural. General principles of cultivation and propagation are covered and well illustrated with beautiful line drawings. The reader is introduced to topics such as sterile seed culture and meristem culture around which tomes have been written and whole horticultural industries have arisen. Orchids are renowned for their vegetative and floral diversity and the basics of plant morphology are explained with good illustrations. Pests and diseases are covered fleetingly.

The selection of genera covered in the diversity section is moderate but targets most of the popular groups and many of the intergeneric hybrids. The nomenclature of intergener-

ic hybrids is bewildering, especially with respect to the *Odontoglossum* alliance, and this is competently explained. Many large orchid genera include species that grow across a wide climatic range. While the reader is introduced to climatic zones of the genera, one is left ignorant as to the environmental requirements of individual species within these genera. A set of symbols could have easily addressed this shortcoming.

It is impossible to make a comprehensive coverage of this range of topics in a book of 124 pages and the author makes no attempt to do so. Instead the book provides accurate snatches of information which entice the reader to delve deeper into the literature. Unfortunately the bibliography is rather brief.

While the layout is visually attractive, one can not help but think that a lot of space is wasted by the indulgent lateral margins. In my opinion this area could have been better used to house additional illustrations or text without adding to the cost of the final product.

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The revised edition of this bestselling book features additional botanical and modern art images by McEwen as well as an introduction by musician Jools Holland. James Fox describes McEwen's life and music and the wide-ranging friendships that he and his wife Romana shared at their house in Chelsea. Richard Demarco remembers his contributions to the avant-garde in Scotland, and Martyn Rix focuses on the botanical aspects of the work. A very popular primer that has served to introduce thousands of hobbyists to the pleasures of orchid growing. It includes useful sections on cultivation, propagation, and pests and diseases, and surveys the most popular genera, species, and hybrids for both greenhouse and windowsill growers.