

Orchid Society of Coral Gables



Monthly Newsletter | May, 2026

The Orchid Society of Coral Gables is a non-profit organization established for the purpose of showing the cultural and economic importance of the orchid, as well as the intrinsic beauty, and biological and ecological importance of this group of plants. We promote the scientific research and study of orchids including their classification, evolution, propagation, culture, care, and development. Additionally, we support the conservation of orchids in nature, and disseminate educational information and knowledge about the orchid family to the general public.

**Next meeting at Fairchild Botanical Gardens
Garden Room
Tuesday May 5th 2026
6:45 Beginners class
7:30pm Meeting**



Dr. Jason L. Downing is the Director of Research at Fairchild Tropical Garden (FTBG), where he focuses on orchid research, propagation, education, and conservation, and most notably, the internationally recognized citizen science program, The Million Orchid Project, the largest public outreach program focused on orchids in the world.

The orchid research, with over 40,000 K-12 and undergraduate students, has led to over 600,000 native orchids being replanted into the public landscapes of South Florida. The conservation and research have been published in peer-reviewed journals and publicized through various media outlets, most notably National Public Radio, National Geographic, In Defense of Plants podcast, and numerous others.

Dr. Downing is originally from Kansas City. He completed his B.S. in Biology at the University of Kansas. After graduation, he relocated to Miami to attend the University of Miami. Dr. Downing served as assistant to the Gifford Arboretum Curator before beginning graduate studies at Florida International University. In 2016, he completed his M.S. in Environmental Science and a Ph.D. in Biology.

During his graduate tenure, he held positions at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (FTBG) and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, working on research related to orchid ecology, mycorrhizal, genetics, and conservation. Dr. Downing has also been working in orchid conservation in Florida, China, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean for over 10 years.

ORCHID SOCIETY OF CORAL GABLES

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE



Dear members:

Happy Cinco de Mayo and Mothers Day! I hope all our moms out there get to have a day off!

The weather this season has been crazy!! Just when you think we will have a few dry days, it rains! In addition, it has been very breezy/windy which doesn't help. Remember, even if it has rained, the wind we have been having dries the plants out. So keep vigilant! Don't assume because it rained a bit your plants have been watered.

I also hope you have all started your fungicide spraying in preparation for the summer rains which will inevitably start soon. You want to get that systemic fungicide into the plant's system and cells early. Waiting for the rains to start is too late. Mid-May is usually when we start getting the summer rains, but with the unusual weather patterns we have been having, it is up to you to watch, every day, and check the status of your orchids every day.

This month we will hear Dr. Jason Downing teaching us about the progress of the Million Orchid Project. The project has grown in size since its beginnings and is now known and copied all across the nation. We even have some of our members working with the project!

Our meeting this month falls right on Cinco de Mayo, and you know what that means – Melana's Taco Bar! Please bring, if you can, assorted sides, salads, and desserts for our table, especially in a Mexican flavor!

Jim will be holding the Beginner's Class this month on Hurricane and Summer Weather Preparedness. Don't miss the tips and hints he can give you to get through the coming summer storms. Class starts at 6:45. And, of course, he can talk about any other topic you would like to ask!

We will be having our Silent Auction this month. Bring your extra plants or divisions to sell to other members.

And of course, don't forget our Show and Tell table. Show off your great orchid babies!

The Rare Plant Festival will be May 1-3 this year. We need volunteers to help man our Plant Hotel and work various jobs at the festival. Please get in touch with our Volunteer Coordinator, Laura Aiken, at laura54orchid@gmail.com.

A special Thank You to Vicky Benitez who is taking over the Newsletter duties. I have been doing it for over 12 years and it is time for some fresh thoughts and ideas. As you can see, she will do a great job!

See you at the meeting!

Melana

May Orchid Care from Motes Orchids

“excerpted from Dr. Martin Motes, Florida Orchid growing”

In May, orchid care shifts as heat and light levels rise. According to Dr. Martin Motes, the primary focus is on managing hydration and nutrition to support the beginning of the heavy growing season.

Motes Orchids Hydration & Humidity

The arid air of early May can quickly dry out foliage, making deep watering essential.

- **Two-Step Watering:** Apply water until it runs off the bottom, wait a few minutes for the roots to soften (like a cork absorbing wine), and then apply a second time to ensure total saturation.
- **Weight Test:** Pick up your plants to check their weight. A "benchmark" plant should feel sufficiently heavy when fully soaked.
- **Water Conservation:** Use shower-head style breakers or mist heads for maximum efficiency and coverage.

Motes Orchids Fertilization Strategy

With increased growth, orchids require a richer diet.

- **Primary Feed:** Use up to 2 tsp of 15-5-15 fertilizer per gallon of water every week.
- **Supplementing:** Alternate your regular fertilizer with a mix of Epsom salts and potassium nitrate (1 tbsp each per gallon) to provide necessary magnesium and potassium.
- **Micro-elements:** May is an ideal time to apply a soluble trace element fertilizer.
- **Critical Rule:** Always substitute fertilizer for a scheduled watering. Apply it in two doses to fully saturate the roots. Do not follow the old advice to "water before fertilizing," as this can lead to over-watering.

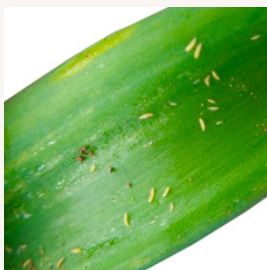
Motes Orchids Pests & Disease Prevention

Warmer temperatures bring out active pests and fungal risks.

- **Fungicide:** To control leaf spotting (like "Thai crud") and crown rot, apply a fungicide like Banrot or Thiophanate Methyl. Using a "spreader-sticker" helps the chemical stay on the plant through heavy spring rains.
- **Pest Control:** Keep an eye out for thrips and mites. If you spot damage, use liquid dish soap (2 oz per gallon) or an appropriate insecticide like Orthene.

Drying Out: Ensure your orchids dry out completely between waterings, as constant moisture is the main cause of fungal growth.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask any member for guidance!



Thrips

Member Spotlight

Member Spotlight Removed



Member Spotlight

Tom's favorite aspect of being an OSCG member is learning to successfully grow orchids in South Florida, especially within an amazing community of orchid enthusiasts. Tom also appreciates visits to members' home gardens, where he gets to see beautiful orchids and other plants. Vandas and Phalaenopsis are his specialties, and large species orchids are also an interest of Tom's.

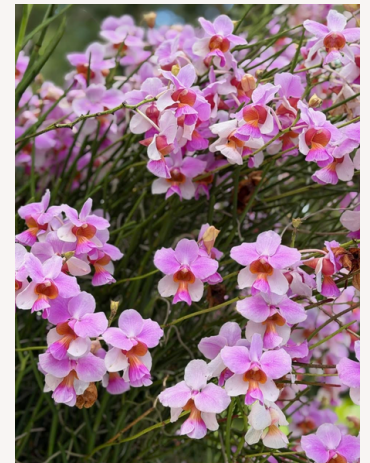
Tom's advice for new members is to read Dr. Motes' book and attend the OSCG monthly meetings, where you'll learn about orchids through the monthly educational programs. But, as important, you'll also get to know other members, who are always willing to share their orchid experience. And I'll add, this includes Tom!

Garden Tour A Day in Two Beautiful Gardens

A special last-minute visit that had something for every garden enthusiast

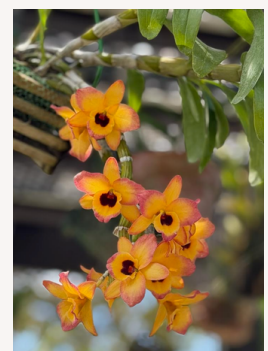
Virginia Benitez Orchids & Koi Garden

Virginia welcomed the group to her stunning garden, home to an impressive collection of orchids — both in trees and in pots — alongside a beautiful Koi pond. She treated members to a live demonstration on repotting a cattleya and a dendrobium, sharing her expertise generously.



Michael & Eileen Primack Aquascape & Five-Pond System

Michael and Eileen's backyard is a true marvel of both nature and engineering. Their incredible aquascape features an amazing fish collection across five interconnected ponds, built up over the years. Michael walked members through the engineering ingenuity behind the system — a fascinating look at how passion and skill come together.



ORCHID SPOTLIGHT



Rothschild's Slipper Orchid

Where it's found: Borneo

Why it's rare: Slow-growing and heavily poached in the wild

Unique properties:

Slow maturation: Can take up to 15 years to bloom

Insect trap design: Its pouch-shaped lip traps insects to ensure pollination

Striped petals: Long horizontal petals with striking maroon stripes

High value: One of the most expensive orchids in the world

Volunteers Needed

Volunteering with our society isn't just about giving your time — it's about being part of something bigger. It's how friendships are forged, how skills are grown, and how memories are made.

Our society thrives only when our members pour their hearts into it. And right now, we have meaningful opportunities waiting for you.

✦ Even a few hours of your time can make a real difference.

✦ No experience needed — just your passion and willingness.

✦ Every role matters, big or small.

If you've ever felt proud to be a member of this society, this is your chance to be the reason someone else feels that same pride.

Sign up to volunteer today — because this society is only as strong as the people who stand behind it. And we believe in you.

Our society thrives because of its members, and we're counting on you to help make this event run smoothly. We're currently seeking volunteers to assist with check-in during all three days. Each shift is just 4 hours, our society will receive \$65.00 for each volunteer.

Thank you for being an important part of our community!

Contact Laura Aiken @laura54orchid@gmail.com

With gratitude,

Virginia Benitez Second Vice-President



Fair Expo Center Fuchs
Pavilion

10901 SW 24th St, Miami, FL
33165, USA
MAY 1 - 3

Photos from April Meeting



New Orchid Discoveries

- A striking new species, *Telipogon cruentilabrum*, was identified in Ecuador. Its red-veined “bloodstained” lip helps attract pollinators and highlights how much biodiversity is still being uncovered.



- Scientists also discovered *Lepanthes nasariana* in Colombia—but warn it could go extinct within decades due to climate change, illustrating the so-called “Nasar Effect.”

- In Indonesia, a new orchid species (*Bulbophyllum bukitrayaense*) was found in a national park, adding to Southeast Asia’s rich orchid diversity.



Conservation & Rediscovery

- The rare *Cypripedium calceolus* (lady’s slipper orchid) has begun naturally reappearing in the wild after reintroduction efforts—an encouraging conservation success.

- In Sri Lanka, *Vanda thwaitesii* was rediscovered after 160 years, thanks to historical drawings.



NEWS

Our annual effort of creating our display for the Fairchild Orchid Festival was again a success! Our exhibit was awarded three Best in Show ribbons! Thank you to all our members for your beautiful orchids and your hard work in mounting our display. This incredible achievement would not be possible without you.

Unfortunately, we experienced terrible weather over the weekend. Sunday brought heavy rain and thunderstorms to the point that Fairchild had to close early. Because this festival is our major annual fundraiser, the early closure has significantly affected our budget.

We are now looking for new and exciting ways to raise funds for our society. If anyone has ideas on how we can generate income to support our activities, we would love your input!

Beginner's Class – Hurricane and Summer Season



This month will be about getting ready for “H” season. Yes, it is that time of year again and it’s always good to review what needs to be done during the summer months and in preparation for upcoming big storms.



Many of us have been through bad summers with our orchids, but we have many new members that may not realize some of the hints and tips we can share about summer prep.

And as always, Jim will be available to answer any orchid questions you may have,

Hospitality Corner! Cinco de Mayo Taco Bar!!!

In honor of Cinco de Mayo, Melana is making a TACO BAR with all the fixings!!

But of course, we always need sides, salads, and desserts (hopefully with a Mexican flair!!)

