

Easter Celebrants Will Deplete Colorful Blooms Cultivated At Lost River Orchids

BY SALLY BAIR

Lancaster Co. Correspondent STRASBURG — Growing orchids for commercial sale is not an activity limited to Hawaii and other exotic sounding locales. Lancaster County boasts a greenhouse devoted entirely to raising orchids, and a step inside is like a visit to a South Pacific island.

Easter weekend will see the depletion of the thousands of beautiful flowers which have been blooming over the last few months. Easter is second only to Mother's Day in the demand for flowers, according to Pat Yohn who nurtures the beautiful flowers on a daily basis at Lost River Orchids, located on Millport Road east of Lancaster.

Although Pat spends a part of almost every day at the greenhouse, the business is really an extension of her husband David's hobby.

This is the first year for the greenhouse and commercial operation, but it grew from a

hobby which began when David's parents visited Hawaii and brought back a plant for him. Since Pat and David's marriage in August, they rented the greenhouse and the business is now firmly established.

She does the day-to-day work of maintaining the more than 3,000 plants because her husband travels widely as a snack food consultant. Previously, she worked as a bank teller.

Through phone calls and taking samples to potential customers, Pat has built up a business with local florists. All flowers are sold wholesale, while plants can be purchased retail. Pat said the flowers are used mostly for floral arrangements. She noted that in the fall, they will have divisions of the plants available for sale.

Pat said it was difficult to decide how many plants they needed for the cut flower market. She added, "A lot of people have come in who have never grown orchids before."

The first season has been a learning experience for the couple,

and it has meant adjusting to the conditions of the greenhouse, which Pat characterizes as a "cool house." Experience has also taught her where the drips are located.

A warm, dry February pushed the buds too fast on many of the plants, and caused the crop to come on before the market. She used the near-disaster as a marketing tool, delivering the flowers to potential customers.

She says many of the orchid plants in the greenhouse are in distress because of adjusting to the growing conditions, and because of the wide variety of plants growing in one greenhouse. She added that moving or shipping plants often causes stress because of varying temperatures and humidity.

Moisture and humidity are extremely important, and when the brilliant sunlight comes streaming in, Pat shows up at the greenhouse to make sure there is proper ventilation. When to water is a crucial decision, and is affected by the soil mix and the size or pot. Plants at the greenhouse range from seedlings to full grown.

Pat, who admits to being fond of other flowers besides orchids, speaks expertly about the orchids under her care, easily naming the exotic sounding plants. Part of her expertise comes through David and the seminars she attended with him, and part comes from experience on a daily basis. She says, "It has been a 'guess method' for me. I don't have a real green thumb." The beautiful, lush blooms belie her modesty.

Pat almost makes it seem as if anyone can grow an orchid. She insists that cymbidiums, the most commonly used variety, are not difficult to grow. Indeed, she says many varieties can be successfully grown in a home with no greenhouse or special conditions necessary.

She says, "Most orchids are fairly tolerant and the plants are not fragile." Nevertheless, she candidly admits, "Some are easy to kill. Some can die overnight." But, she adds, "Very few people can kill cymbidiums."

One reason few people grow them at home, Pat says, is "they grow so large. They are definitely the hardiest." In this climate they should be outside in the summer, but must be sprayed before being brought indoors for the winter.

Cymbidium orchids do not grow well in Hawaii although they like dampness and bright sunshine. The heat of the islands is too much



Pat Yohn works with one of the many standard cattleya orchids found in her Lost River Orchids greenhouse on Millport Road in Lancaster County.

for them, and the only place they can be found is high in some mountains.

The cymbidium remains Pat's personal favorite because they "get a lot of flowers and last a long time." Indeed, most orchids have long-lasting flowers, some blooms

staying for up to four months.

Standard cattleyas take up a large share of greenhouse space. The lush large blooms are not only showy, but fragrant as well. Mini-cattleyas are equally popular, however, because of the smaller

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Cymbidium orchids are perhaps the most frequently used variety and remain Pat Yohn's personal favorite because of their numerous flowers.

Homestead Notes



These showy orchids are phalaenopsis, a variety which comes in a wide range of unusual color variations.



Cutting beautiful blooms is just one small part of the orchid business. Here Pat Yohn works with some of the smaller plants. Patience is required when working with orchids because many varieties take years to mature and bloom