



## Steve Frowine: The Orchid Man

by Charlie Nardozi, Horticulturist



Steve Frowine is a self-proclaimed "plant nerd." Ever since he was a kid he's loved plants. "I started helping my neighbor, 'Miz' Connell weed her garden when I was a youngster," says Steve. "I've had my nose in plants ever since." His dad, a successful lawyer in Portsmouth, Ohio, wasn't sure that horticulture was a field his son should study. To test him, he got young Steve a job at a local florist, instructing the owner to "pay him a Pepsi a day and work him hard." It backfired. Steve loved the job so much he was bent on studying horticulture in college and making it his career.

His fixation with orchids started in junior high school when his dad brought one back as a present from Florida. Now Steve resides in Ajijic, Mexico where he grows a wide range of orchids outdoors. Usually Steve has little patience for plants that don't bloom, but not so with orchids. "I've been growing a division of a lady slipper orchid (*Paphiopedilum* Langley Pride 'Burlingame' HCC/AOS) for 26 years. It finally bloomed for the first time this winter," he says. Now that's obsession!

### Mr. Horticulture

Steve's resume reads like a list of the top organizations and companies in the U.S. horticultural world. He has worked at the Missouri Botanical Garden, National Tropical Botanical Garden in Hawaii, Cleveland Botanical Garden, Pittsburgh Civic Garden Center, W. Atlee Burpee, White Flower Farm, Etera, International Garden Products, and Dutch Gardens. He's written articles for most major gardening magazines and has been on the boards of the Garden Writers Association (GWA), National Gardening Association (NGA), and American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA) and on the Visiting Committee of Longwood Gardens. Steve has written four orchid books, *Orchids for Dummies* by published by Wiley and *Fragrant Orchids*, *Miniature Orchids*, and his forthcoming book , due out in August 2008, *Moth Orchids, the Complete Guide to Phalaenopsis*, by Timber Press. Through all these changes and years in horticulture, one area that has remained constant is Steve's love of growing orchids. Now, the passion for orchids has caught on with amateur and professional gardeners alike.



*Paphiopedilum* Langley Pride 'Burlingame' HCC/AOS

### **And Why Grow Orchids?**

"The popularity of orchids is exploding," says Steve. In the horticultural Mecca of Holland, it is the most popular potted plant grown. In the U.S., orchids are currently second behind poinsettias as the most popular flowering potted plant. The reasons for this rise in popularity are many. "It used to be you'd need a greenhouse to grow orchids, and only the very wealthy would be involved," says Steve. "Now, with modern plant breeding and cloning, new and superior orchids are available for a lower price. Plus, many are easy to grow," he adds. "Orchids can bloom for months indoors in winter — right when you need a flowery burst," says Steve. Some, such as the moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*), is well adapted to indoor lighting and temperatures, often blooming without much effort. Breeders are creating more compact-growing orchids that are perfect for windowsills. And orchids make a major fashion statement. "They signify elegance and a good life," says Steve.

The next wave in orchid mania is fragrant orchids. Most of the orchids widely available to home gardeners look beautiful but have no scent. Like other garden flowers, such as roses, fragrance has been bred out of many modern varieties. But there are orchids that smell like vanilla, chocolate, cinnamon, citrus, gardenia, and even rose.

### **Orchid Growing Tips**

The easiest orchids to grow at home are the moth orchids (*Phalaenopsis*). If you don't have a sunny windowsill, the best way to get your orchids blooming is to grow them as Steve does, under fluorescent lights. Steve also likes to place his orchids outside in summer in a shady area or lathe house. "The orchids increase in size, and the cool night temperatures help trigger flowering in winter and spring," he says.

So what are an orchid guru's favorite orchids? Here's Steve's short list of easy-to-grow, fragrant orchids to try at home.

Five easy and very fragrant orchids:

*Oncidium* 'Sharry Baby' (Chocolate Orchid). This widely available orchid smells like chocolate and vanilla.

*Brassavola nodosa* (Lady of the Night). Its glistening, white flowers have a heavenly evening fragrance.

*Neofinetia falcata* (Japanese Wind Orchid). This orchid is revered by the Japanese for its jasmine scent. It's a small grower perfect for windowsills or under lights.

*Rhynchostylis gigantea* (Foxtail Orchid). A larger orchid best suited to a sunroom or greenhouse, this one will fill up a room with its pungent citrus-like intoxicating scent.

*Encyclia cordigera* (Butterfly Orchid). It has a sumptuous scent that is a blend of vanilla and honey.

For more information on orchid growing, Steve recommends checking out the American Orchid Society Web site at: <http://www.orchidweb.org>

[Newsletter home page](#)

Steve has his own Web site that gives information about his present and upcoming books and background. Check it out at : <http://members.authorsguild.net/stevefrow/>