

Cymbidium Chatter



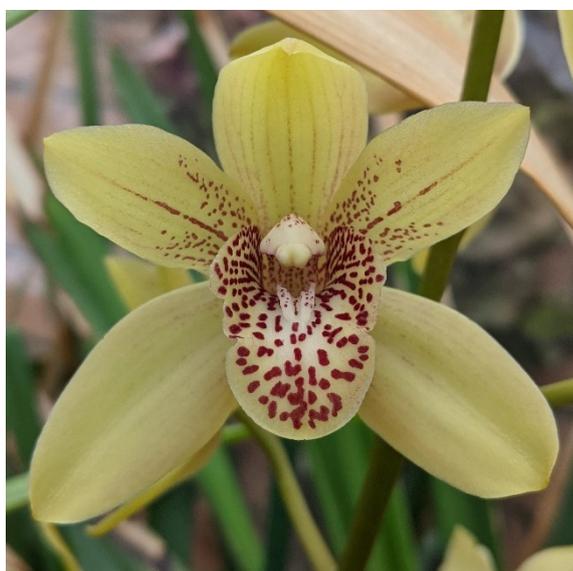
Cym. ensifolium 'Shi Chang Hong'

Issue 36 (Vol. 3 No. 2): April 2022

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Latest News



Welcome to the second issue of *Cymbidium Chatter* for 2022. This one is shorter than usual, primarily due to time constraints and being unable to arrange an interview for this issue in time. None-the-less, I hope you enjoy it and find it informative.

Spikes are already appearing on a number of my early and mid-season plants (at least the ones the rats didn't get to... see the article later in this issue) and two plants have already flowered for the season (*Cym. ensifolium*, pictured above, and *Grcym. Pakkret Gargoyle*, left). Hopefully you are also seeing spikes appearing on your plants!

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Plant Profile: Cym. New Century

This hybrid was originally made by Susumu Furuya of Mukoyama Orchids, who used the regular diploid form of Sarah Jean 'Ice Cascade' and the diploid Alexanderi 'Fine' and registered it in 1995.

"Susumu Furuya only used [Alexanderi 'Fine'] because I had asked for a piece! I wanted it for historical reasons only and Susu thought I was going to make hybrids from it. All in all, a very serendipitous outcome." – Andy Easton

Andy also remade the cross several years later whilst at Geysersland Orchids, using the same parents. He reports that due to Sarah Jean's tendency to produce unreduced gametes, many of the New Century plants were triploid. Unfortunately, this means that they are often poor parents, with low fertility and a high percentage of aneuploid progeny.



Cym. Sarah Jean 'Ice Cascade'.
Photo courtesy of [Ursula Kammlott](#).



Cym. Alexanderi 'Fine'.
Photo courtesy of Kevin Butler (Ezi-Gro Orchids).

There are five registered cross with New Century as the pod parent and two as the pollen parent. All but one were made by Mukoyama (presumably they identified one of the few selections that breeds), with the odd one out made by Geoff Bailey (Memoria Ern Kettle).

- Enzan Century (2008) = New Century X Enzan Spring
- Far East Century (2007) = *Cym. goeringii* X New Century
- Koushu Century (2010) = New Century X Little Fire
- Memoria Ern Kettle (2019) = Plush Canyon X New Century
- New Beauty (2007) = New Century X Vivid Beauty
- New Rainbow (2005) = New Century X Khai Rainbow's End
- Pumi Century (2011) = New Century X Pumi-Flame

Despite Geoff previously stating that New Century was the pollen parent in Issues 15 & 22, I confirmed with him that his cross was as registered: Plush Canyon 'Red Eye' 4n X New Century 'Kimberley'. He believes the erratic growth early on (reported in Issue 15) was the result of inadequate conditions for the plants.



*Top: Cym. New Century 'Spica' (also known as 'Spicer') CC/OSCOV
 Middle: Cym. New Century 'Jenny' Cultural Award/CSA (left) and Cym. New Century 'Rosie' (right)
 Bottom: an unnamed selection of Cym. New Century (left) and Cym. New Century 'Robbo' (right)*

Several selections are still in circulation in Australia and are displayed at shows on a regular basis. 'Spica' is an example of the Mukoyama Orchids cross, whilst 'Rosie' is from the Geyserland remake.

Photos from Pierre Pujol

Despite a poor flowering season in northern California, Pierre has been able to provide some photos of various plants in his collection and seedlings from his breeding programme.



Ventral (sepal) pelorics have been one of Pierre's breeding goals and several of his crosses have successfully produced them thus far. Shown on the left is Cym. Audrey's Delight 'Snow White' (Son of Freak X Kirby Lesh), which Pierre likes for its clean markings and strong contrast. This cross has produced seedlings with red, pink, brown or white coloured flowers 10-14 cm in width. Fifty percent of the progeny was sepal peloric. The next generation is already in the pipeline with the goal to further improve flower form and self-opening.



A rather dramatic petal peloric in Pierre's collection is this selection of Cym. Loren's Fantasy. He commented:

"What is the result when crossing two petal peloric Cymbidiums? The late Loren Batchman from Casa de la Orquideas was not shying away from trying these far-fetched crosses. Here is a result from his cross of two famous petal peloric Cymbidiums (Strathdon 'Cooksbridge Fantasy' X Cherry Shower 'No Peace'). This is the cultivar 'Papillon' that I acquired from Casa's collection. It surely makes a statement!"



Another seedling of Pierre's hybrid Cym. Mini-Me (Vogel's Magic 'Waikanae' X Kirby Lesh 'Cinnabar') has bloomed this past season (two others were previously featured in Issue 32). He has named this one 'Petite' due to it being a small plant. On its first blooming, it produced three arching spikes with small, bright pink flowers.



Also last seen in Issue 32 was Cym. Mem. Pat Proctor 'Woodside' (Tower of Gold X Tower of Fire), which Pierre happily noted is getting better every year. On its most recent flowering it had three spikes with 13cm flowers. He describes it as a reliable bloomer and a compact plant.

Sometimes a good plant can result from an unplanned cross, such as Pierre's Cym. Hazel Fire 'Woodside' (Hazel Faye 'Ember' X Tower of Fire 'Sunset Flames'). He comments that this is the *"best of the cross for flower shape, size, bright colour, and floriferousness (5 spikes last year in a 2gal pot). A bit bunched this year due to cold temperatures when the spikes were elongating. A lucky result for a last-minute chance cross (left-over pollen from Tower of Fire). Sometimes, the serendipity of genetic recombination gives a better result than overthinking a hybrid; it keeps us humble."*



Pierre has used *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise' in a few crosses and the first of these to bloom is *Cym. Sylvia Darr* (Pinata Magic 'Stirling' X *Cym. erythraeum* var. *flavum* 'Paradise'). He notes that there has been significant variation in the flower colour, spot patterns and shapes. They have been good growers and compact plants, flowering in 5" pots with long-lasting fragrant flowers.



Right: *Cym. Sylvia Darr* 'Woodside' AM/AOS, CCM/AOS
 Below: two seedlings showing the variation in the grex.



For readers in Australia, selected clones and seedlings from a sib-cross may be available in future, as one of the nurseries imported a flask of this cross from Pierre.

Rodent Damage & Control

This year, for the first time, I have suffered significant damage to my Cymbidium collection courtesy of rats. Speaking with other growers, around this time of the year is when they often do damage and so controls are essential.

I had seen glimpses of rodents scurrying through the ivy on the fenceline at my new residence but didn't realise how big a problem they were until they attacked my orchid benches over the course of about a week.



Examples of rodent damage to Cymbidiums.

90% of the plants on the two benches nearest the fenceline had their new growths destroyed like in the photos above. As you can imagine, this sets back the affected plants by a year, having lost all their new growth. The rats targeted the immature pseudobulbs, often eating the top half of the bulb and leaving the chewed-off leaves strewn around. Another grower I spoke to mentioned that they also like to go after new spikes, but of the handful of spikes that had emerged at the time, only one was eaten. One left intact was just emerging from an immature bulb that was eaten; I seriously doubt it will develop much further before it aborts.

By the time I implemented controls, it was too late. As an interim measure to try to protect the plants until I could get mesh to wrap around the benches and protect the plants, I sprayed everything with Richgro Beat-a-Bug (a mix of chilli, garlic and pyrethrum) in the hope that the chili and garlic would make the plants less tasty. Whilst rats are reported to dislike the strong smell of garlic, the impact of

this measure was unclear – it is possible that the reduction in damage that followed was because they rats had already eaten most of the appealing new growths.



Spike emerging from an eaten bulb. I expect this will abort in the near future.



Galvanised steel bird netting/mesh fitted to the sides of the orchid benches to stop the rats.

I also set up bait stations behind the benches and placed Ratsak Naturals in them. There are several off-the-shelf outdoor stations that you can purchase, or you can easily make them (the newsletter of the Cymbidium Orchid Club of South Australia, *Cymbidium News*, featured one in the March 2022 issue aka Vol. 24 No. 2). I had previously purchased Ratsak Naturals for rodent control at my previous residence, as given the number of pets and wildlife in the area I wanted to minimise the risk of any secondary poisonings. Whilst effective, it does take up to five feeds to kill and depends on the user being able to remove more appealing food sources (such as tasty Cymbidium leads). Your choice of rodenticide may vary, but I would encourage you to consider which animals in the area may be able to access it or may feed on the dying/dead rodents. If you have pets, please consult your vet if you are not sure.

I purchased a role of galvanised steel bird netting (1.3cm aperture) and wrapped it around the sides and back of the shelving, after receiving suggestions to directly protect the plants. Metal mesh was recommended, as rats can chew through shadecloth if so inclined. Since implementing these measures, I have observed no further damage, but again it is hard to say whether this is a result of the measures taken or whether the rats have simply eaten everything they wanted!

Propagating from Backbulbs

There are three main ways that a grower can produce more of the same plant:

- by cloning (usually something only commercial growers do),
- by division (usually when they get too big),
- or by “striking” backbulbs.

Propagating from backbulbs is an easy way to increase the number of pieces of the same plant and uses only the leafless pseudobulbs that we often dispose of when dividing or repotting plants.



Recently potted backbulbs.



A single backbulb that struck soon after potting up.

When I repot or divide a plant, I remove any excess backbulbs and assess them. If they are solid and of reasonable size, I will clean them up (removing all the leaf husks I can) and pot them up. Depending on how many I have from a plant, I will either put multiple backbulbs in a wide, shallow pot or single backbulbs in a small pot (usually about twice the width of the bulb). I plant the backbulbs in cheap orchid bark and bury the bottom third of the bulb, along with any intact roots (usually backbulbs don't have any live roots, though).

After that, you have to wait! Watering should just be enough to keep the media moist but not sodden; you don't want to encourage rot. Some backbulbs strike very quickly and put up a new growth within a few months, whilst others may take six months or longer. It seems to vary a great deal and is dependent on the species or hybrid. Usually after one year any that are going to grow will have done so and the rest will have rotted out (they will be soft/squishy to touch and feel hollow).

Some growers will remove the backbulb once the new lead is established, but I prefer to leave the backbulb in place for the developing growth and only remove it when depleted. Once the new growth is well underway, I repot them individually and treat as per any other young plant.



Only one of the three backbulbs successfully struck; the other two rotted. This is not a vigorous hybrid.



This single backbulb propagation grew well.

Acknowledgements and Contributions

I hope you have enjoyed this issue. If you have any feedback or would like to contribute (whether it be just one or two photos, an idea for an article, or to volunteer for an interview), please get in touch! I can be reached at jwhite88@gmail.com.

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The next issue is planned for June 2022.