



ESSEX

ORCHID SOCIETY

Growing together, sharing knowledge, inspiring passion

SEPTEMBER
NEWSLETTER

2026

Welcome Back!

A very warm welcome back to all our members as we head into the autumn programme.

What a summer it's been. The unusually high temperatures tested even our most experienced growers, and many of us spent the warmer months battling scorch, stress and the odd sulking plant rather than enjoying a season off.

The good news is that autumn is exactly the reset our orchids need. As temperatures ease and the light begins to change, we hope you're already seeing signs of recovery: fresh roots, new growths, and that welcome return of vigour after a testing few months. If your plants are still finding their feet, don't worry, many will bounce back over the coming weeks with a little patience and TLC.

With that in mind, we're delighted to welcome you all back to our 2026/27 programme of meetings, talks and shows. It promises to be a full and varied programme, and as ever, our society continues to work hard to promote the joy of orchid growing and to welcome new members into our friendly community.

A special thank you to everyone who has sent in photographs, articles and other material for the newsletter over recent months. Do keep them coming - newsletters are always better when they're full of your plants, your experiences and your ideas.

Here's to a great autumn season ahead.

The Essex Orchid Society Committee

In this issue:

1. Welcome back
2. Meet our Member – Mary Ma
3. So You Bought Your First Supermarket Orchid!
4. Genus Spotlight Dendrochilums
5. How Hard Can It Be?
6. Keeping a Log and Looking Ahead



NEXT MEETING

Saturday 12th September 2026

A Victorian Obsession with Orchids by Ray Payne



Doors open 1:30pm
Meeting 2:00pm -
4:00pm



South Green Memorial
Hall,
Billericay, CM11 2PR



VISIT OUR WEBSITE
essexorchidsociety.org.uk



FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM
[@essex.orchid.society](https://www.instagram.com/essex.orchid.society)



FIND US ON FACEBOOK
Essex Orchid Society

MEET OUR MEMBER –

Mary Ma



About You

When did your interest in orchids begin, and what first sparked your passion?

I've been growing orchids for more than 15 years. Like many other orchid growers, I started with Phalaenopsis purchased from supermarkets. Then, gradually, I added some Oncidiums when I found them at my local garden centres. Had my first mail-order in 2020 during lockdown and it opened up a whole new world to me. I never knew there were so many different orchid genera!

Which orchid genus is your favourite, and why?

Hard to say which is my favourite as each of them has something I love, e.g I love the elegant shape and fragrance of Chinese Cymbidiums, the beautiful colour of Oncidiums, the cuteness of Neofinetia falcata. I even love a particular plant for the challenges it gave me.



Approximately how many orchids do you currently grow?

400+ I think.



Your Growing Environment

Tell us a little about where you grow your orchids – greenhouse, windowsill, etc.

I have adjusted my set up several times in the past. At the moment, in summer, majority of them are in my garden except Vandas and Dendrobium Phalaenopsis which prefer hot temperatures. In winter, they all come indoors, majority in my south facing conservatory with glass roof and my sitting room is mainly for those in bloom.

Other reasons are a bit complicated, for example cool-growing plants are in the greenhouse whilst warm-growing plants are still indoors, or when the cool-growing ones are in the garden, the warm-growing ones would be moved into the greenhouse for a little while before moving to the garden. It all depends on the temperature requirement of the plants.



MEET OUR MEMBER – MARY MA

Growing Orchids

What has been your biggest success as an orchid grower?

Finally figured out how to make *Miltoniopsis* happy after killing half a dozen of them.

What has been your biggest lesson or challenge?

The biggest challenge would be growing Chinese Cymbidiums as I still haven't had a clue!

What's the single best piece of orchid-growing advice you've ever received?

I have received so much good advice. There's always something I don't know/need to learn.

Is there one cultivation tip you think every orchid grower should know?

Do your homework! You can't grow it successfully without knowing its cultural requirements.

Is there a species or hybrid you still dream of owning?

I have a wish list which is a very long.



Quick Fire Questions

Most rewarding genus:

Miltoniopsis (hope one day it is Chinese Cymbidiums!)

Most difficult genus:

Chinese Cymbidiums!

Early morning watering or evening watering:

Both. Neos need to be watered in the afternoon especially during hot days. It is said *Cattleya purpurata* needs to have water delivered to it. It is well, I usually water them whenever I have time but avoid the hottest time of the day in summer.

One orchid book you would recommend:

I have probably read the majority of the orchids I like has and they are all useful at some point.



What keeps you passionate about growing orchids after all these years?

They are far more interesting and challenging than other genera, such as *Rosa*, *Hydrangea*, *Dahlia*. There are always new things to try out and I never feel bored with them.

So You Bought Your First Supermarket Orchid

Congratulations, you're now an orchid grower. Try not to panic.

That plastic pot and bark it came in? Fine for now - no need to repot it the moment you get through the door. Give it a proper pot with drainage once the flowers have finished, not before.

Water once a week, not every day. Run lukewarm water through the roots at the sink, let it drain fully, and never leave the pot sitting in a saucer of water. And no, the ice cube trick isn't real orchid care, it's a marketing idea from a company that had ice cubes to sell. Your orchid didn't evolve in a freezer.

Light matters more than most people expect. A bright windowsill out of direct midday sun is ideal, east or north-facing is generally safest. South-facing works too, just keep it back from the glass.

When the flowers eventually drop, resist the urge to bin it. That's not death, that's a rest. With a bit of light, water and mild feed through spring and summer, most supermarket orchids will flower again often more than once.

If yours does sulk, drop leaves, or generally look unimpressed with your efforts, don't take it personally. Every grower in this society killed at least one before they got the hang of it. Some of us are still working on it.

Bring your questions and your orchids, thriving or otherwise to the next meeting. We've all been there.



MEMBER TIP

Orchids reward patience more than anything else. Small, steady care beats grand gestures every time.

Dendrochilums - Amazing Chain Orchids

Care notes from Burnham Nurseries

At Burnham Nurseries we have always grown a wide range of species and it's always nice to grow ones that are easier to keep for the amateur growers. We have quite a few *Dendrochilum* species now and they are always popular with the visitors, for such small flowers they put on quite a show. We also find that they are easy for us to propagate by division as they regularly produce multiple new growths meaning that they grow into specimen plants easily within a few years. We then take the large plant and split it up into smaller plants that are more manageable for windowsill growers. If you have the space you can let your plant grow large and enjoy the spectacle that it will give you on flowering, whilst taking it to your local orchid show for others to enjoy too.

Dendrochilums are known as the “chain orchids” as their flower stems hold many small tiny flowers along their length as they arch or cascade over the foliage. Their blooms are star-shaped, often in green, white or yellow shades but also orangey red. The leaves vary from long and wide as in *D. magnum* which also has small rounded pseudobulbs to grasslike as in *D. tenellum* and even thick and leathery as in *D. javieri*. These last two also do not have pseudobulbs and the plants grow as clumps of leaves. These two forms of plant habit are both common throughout the genus. The plants alone make them an interesting and varied group to grow, with others even having a creeping habit.

They are distributed widely across South East Asia to New Guinea but most species are found in The Philippines and on the island of Borneo. The actual number of species seems up for debate but it is at least 100 and recent new taxonomy has now put the genus *Dendrochilum* into the genus *Coelogyne*. I don't really want to get into that debate and over the years we have kept up with the many taxonomic changes within the orchid family but I will say that for now we are keeping our *dendrochilums* as *dendrochilums*! We also grow many *coelogyne*s in our nursery and I think it would be too confusing if all we had to offer were *coelogyne*s!



Dendrochilum coccineum



Dendrochilum tenellum

Dendrochilums - Amazing Chain Orchids

Care notes from Burnham Nurseries

We grow our Dendrochilum stock in our intermediate greenhouse which is kept between 12-25 degrees C. They are alongside such other orchids as maxillarias, brassias, prosthecheas and miltionias as well as our bench of mixed orchid seedlings. There is diffused sunlight through the polycarbonate roof and this gets additional shading painted on and netting rolled out on the south facing roof for the summer months. The dendrochilums actually grow under the north side of the roof which is not given extra shading so they do get lots of natural light but not direct sun. There are also some large orchids growing in baskets above them which all helps with shade and humidity.

Some species like *D. glumaceum* grow in the winter, when they also flower, and rest in the summer so we water them steadily through winter when new shoots are growing and then also through the summer when it is naturally hotter to prevent them dehydrating. Showing that some orchids do need all year round watering. In general I would say that they are quite thirsty plants but still take care not to overwater and rot roots. Make sure you also mist the leaves regularly over and under the leaves. Too hot and dry and they can be prone to red spider mite.

Some suggestions of easy species to start with:

- *D. glumaceum* - many white flowers, very fragrant and winter flowering
- *D. tennellum* - tiny flowers on multiple stems from thin grassy foliage, winter flowering
- *D. coccineum* - graceful arching sprays of terracotta coloured flowers in spring
- *D. cobbianum* - larger green/yellow flowers, fragrant, summer flowering
- *D. pallidiflavens* - creeping, bushy habit, miniature flowers on short stems, keep well watered



Dendrochilum glumaceum



Dendrochilum latifolium

*Article kindly provided by Sara Rittershausen
from Burnham Nurseries, Newton Abbot, Devon*

How Hard Can it Be?

My favourite orchids (and one that's beating me)

Growing orchids takes a bit of specialist care to get them thriving and blooming well — though it's not nearly as daunting as people assume (he says, but read on). Every type has its own character: its own light, temperature and watering needs. Rather like the very different requests of my two children.

I don't have a favourite child, but I do have a favourite orchid: the *Cattleya*. Its large, showy blooms and rich fragrance never stops fascinating me. A close second is *Phalaenopsis Bellina* — I love its colour and fragrance (see flower on the right).

My first young *Bellina* didn't make it, I'll admit. So when the second plant arrived, I was thrilled — and confident. I'd learned my lesson from the first round: too much water, not enough light. Still, I knew more homework was needed.

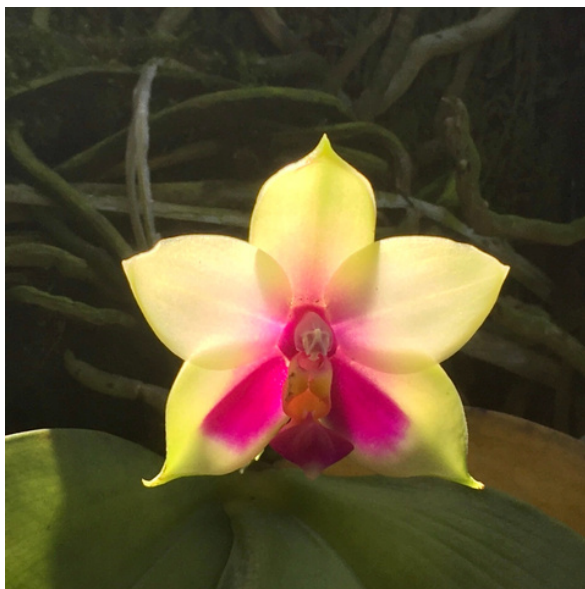
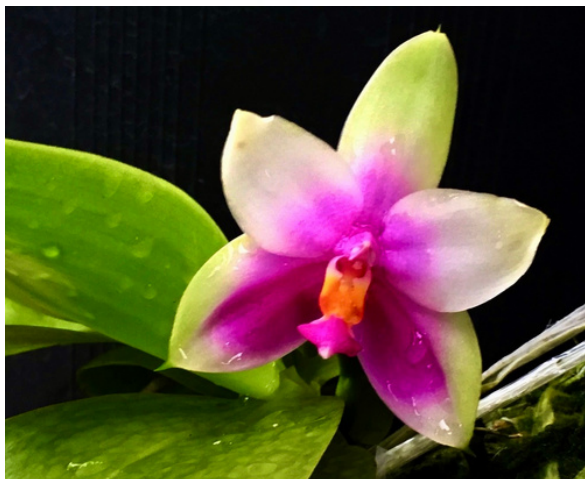
After several evenings of digging into it, I discovered *Bellina* love high humidity. So I bought a propagator with proper ventilation ducts, to keep air circulating and moisture evaporating evenly. After surveying the whole house, I settled on the bathroom as its new home — plenty of humidity, and soft, diffused light.

At last, it started growing. Slowly, of course. Six months in, the leaves have finally appeared — but unevenly: some large, others tiny. Despair! After 15 years of growing orchids, I've finally met my match. Which is exactly why I find this plant so intriguing and, if I'm honest, a little maddening too. As I said, every orchid has its own personality.

The sting in the tail is that *Bellina* is a variety of *Phalaenopsis* - the moth orchid, the most popular orchid sold in this country. Thousands are bought from supermarkets and garden centres every year and grown successfully indoors, sometimes with barely a second thought. So why won't mine cooperate?

For now, I just smile and nod politely whenever fellow members rave about their gorgeous *Bellina* blooms and how easy they were to grow. It stings a little. But come on — how hard can it really be?

The Editor





Keeping a Log & Looking Ahead

Keeping a Log Makes a Difference

A simple habit for better growing

Whether you're new to orchids or have been growing for years, keeping a log can be incredibly helpful. It doesn't need to be complicated – a notebook, spreadsheet or even notes on your phone will do.

A growing record can help you:

- Track progress – see what works and what doesn't.
- Remember key dates – such as repotting, flowering and fertilising.
- Spot patterns – identify seasonal growth cycles and any recurring problems.
- Tailor care – different genera have different needs, and a log helps you fine tune your approach.
- Celebrate success – it's lovely to look back and see how far your plants have come!

Over time, your log becomes a valuable reference and a record of your growing journey.



Next Presentation

Saturday 10 October 2026

Plants in Flower in the Nursery and Their Care

Zsuzsa Serer (Spicesotic)

Zsuzsa will be sharing a wonderful selection of plants currently in flower at the nursery, along with practical advice on their care. This promises to be an inspiring and informative talk – don't miss it!



World Orchid Show 2029

Tokyo, Japan | 10 – 13 March 2029

Mark your calendars — the 25th World Orchid Conference has been confirmed for 10–13 March 2029 in Tokyo, Japan. The announcement was made at the close of this year's conference in Dresden, and it'll be the first time Japan has hosted since Tokyo welcomed the event back in 1987, over four decades ago. Full details on the venue and programme are still to come, but for anyone thinking about making the trip, it's never too early to start planning.



What's Coming Up?

In October's newsletter we'll be looking at:

Orchids and Wellbeing - How growing orchids can support mental health and bring joy to everyday life.

RO Water and its Benefits - What RO water is, why it's useful for orchids, and how it can help keep your plants in top condition.

...and more!

Orchid Events Calendar

Looking for orchid shows, talks, and events near and far? Check out Pumpkin Beth's Orchid Events page for an up-to-date list:

www.pumpkinbeth.com/events

Orchid Trivia

Which orchid genus is often known as the "vanilla orchid"?

Orchids are found on every continent except Antarctica.

Answers in the next issue!