

## Thousands marvel at colorful orchids



Carolyn Butcher has collected orchids from many countries. PHOTO/KATERINA MIHAILIDIS

BY KATERINA MIHAILIDIS  
OU News Bureau

Hundreds of orchids were on display and thousands were for sale at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Michigan Orchid Society show the weekend of March 24-25.

“You’ll see a lot of different varieties here that you won’t see at Kroger’s or Lowe’s,” said Carolyn Butcher, trustee and former president of the Detroit-based society.

She said the show in Madison Heights — with more than 2,000 visitors — is the second largest in the Midwest.



Orchids attract people because they’re unusual and exotic.

PHOTO/KATERINA MIHAILIDIS

“You can see how many people are interested,” Butcher said. “It’s really exciting.”

At scheduled times, visitors followed a guided tour of the displays and attended classes on how to grow and repot orchids.

Janet Fletcher of Detroit, who’s attended a number of orchid shows, said the lady slippers were her favorites. She enjoys the varieties and colors.

“I love them,” she said.

Bob Gordon came to the show for the first time to learn more about orchids. A friend who grows orchids recommended that he go.

“The diversity of color of flowers is unbelievable,” Gordon said. “I know nothing about orchids, so I was curious to see what they were all about.”

The Michigan Orchid Society was founded in the 1950s to educate people about orchids, Butcher said. Its 150 members meet once a month to welcome speakers and display and discuss orchids. Meetings last about three hours.

“I would say we’ve got as many men as we’ve got women,” she said.

Butcher joined in the early 1970s.

“We were the young upstarts,” she said. “Now I’m 80.”

### A passionate collector

A collector and a hobbyist, Butcher has traveled to countries all over the world to find orchids, including Argentina, Burma and Thailand.

“It’s different when you see them growing in the wild,” Butcher said. “They don’t have the same culture as when you put them in a pot and you take care of them. The bees and the bugs don’t bite them. They’re a lot prettier now they’re in pots.”



Visitors attended a guided tour and participated in educational classes at the annual orchid show. PHOTO/KATERINA MIHAILIDIS

Butcher has always loved flowers. The first orchid she collected is called *Leptotes bicolor*. She found it in Argentina in a tree. Although dressed up, Butcher said she climbed the tree to get it.

In Africa, Butcher found an area growing vanilla, a kind of orchid.

“You’re seeing wild animals but then all of a sudden up in a tree there’s a vanilla,” she said. “It’s special.”

In Burma, Butcher happened upon a sea of *paph bellatulum*, an orchid that is white with purple dots.

“There was 10,000 of them,” Butcher said. “I had a permit, but I only brought 21 back home. I could’ve brought many, many more. It was so special to see them growing because it was my favorite flower.”

### About orchids

Orchids are epiphytes. They attract people because they’re unusual and exotic, according to Butcher.

“They grow on trees but they don’t take anything from the tree,” she said. “Their roots just cling to the bark.”

There are over 30,000 different types of orchids. That number does not include the hybrid species that hobbyists breed.

“It’s interesting seeing the different varieties,” Butcher said.

To grow, orchids require sunlight or artificial light, air movement and fertilizer. They need to get wet and dry every day.

People have their orchids in greenhouses, on windowsills or under lights. Butcher said she once had 700 orchids under lights.

“Some people have two orchids,” she said. “Some people have, you know, hundreds.”

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