

Sales, Image of Orchids Improving

STABY

by Charles B. Adams

When it comes to supermarket floral sales, orchids are misunderstood flowers. In the minds of customers—and floral managers—orchids conjure images of rare, beautiful, exotic blooms. Unfortunately, they also conjure images of high expense and limited, seasonal availability.

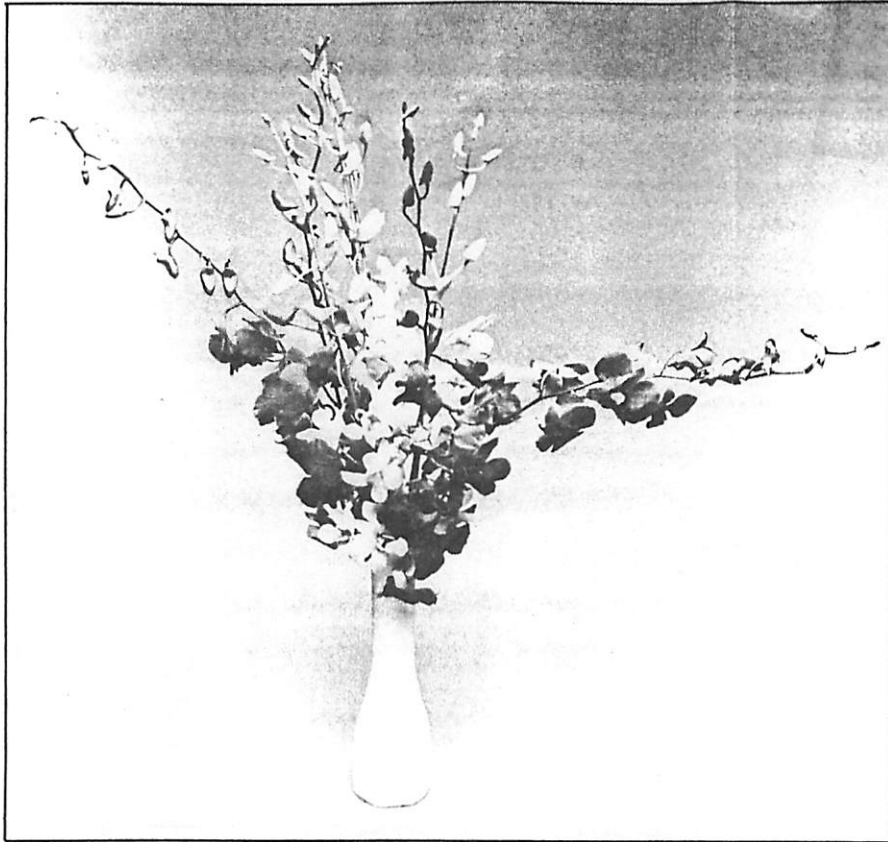
Because of their exotic, expensive image, supermarket floral managers haven't been eager to add orchids to their inventories. But this scenario is changing, according to David Laird, general manager of Flori-Ad International Inc., Elk Grove Village, Ill., a flower import company. Laird says orchid sales have "dramatically increased" in the past three or four years, and he expects the sales rise to continue. In particular, he believes the Dendrobium orchid will become increasingly popular.

Part of the recent upswing in orchid sales is due to consumers' desires to try new products. "I think people look for new items. Orchids aren't traditional types of flowers; they're exotic," Laird says.

In the past, orchids primarily have been used for wedding and party arrangements, Laird says. "The consumer probably hasn't been introduced to using it."

Laird says he would like to see more orchids offered to consumers in cash-and-carry bouquets and home arrangements. Because of the many preconceptions that retailers and consumers have, Laird recommends that floral managers test the potential popularity of orchids, especially Dendrobiums. "Try it, introduce it to see what the reaction is," he says.

Dendrobium orchids are easy to merchandise because of their beauty, their image and because they have a long



Pictured are white and lavender Dendrobium orchids.

shelf life, which makes them a good value. Laird says orchids are impulse items and lend themselves well to promotions. In addition, "Dendrobiums are priced better for supermarkets."

Another popular type of orchid for supermarket floral departments is the Catalaya orchid, according to Ron Hausermann, president and sales manager of EFG Orchids, a division of Elmhurst Flower Growers Inc., Addison, Ill. Hausermann says Catalayas are available in a "multitude of colors," including yellow,

orange, green, lavender and white.

Catalayas—and all orchids in general—tend toward being seasonal, holiday-oriented floral items, Hausermann says. For supermarkets, the best orchid sales are Valentine's Day, Easter and Mother's Day. For these holidays, orchids primarily are used for corsages.

However, Hausermann believes orchids will become less seasonal and holiday-oriented as floral designers offer them in arrangements. "The trend is coming when there will be more orchids in arrangements,"

he says.

As more supermarkets hire designers for their floral departments, Hausermann believes more orchids will be offered in arrangements, and customers will begin to expect to see them on a year-round basis. Like Laird, Hausermann recommends that retailers emphasize the longevity of orchids, because many customers don't realize that the blooms are hardy and can last one week to four weeks in a vase, depending on the variety.

At Gallup and Stribling Or-

chids Inc., Santa Barbara, Calif., the Cymbidium orchid accounts for approximately 70 percent of all orchid sales, according to secretary-treasurer Gary Gallup. Gallup and Stribling offers orchids to supermarket retailers and thus can monitor which varieties sell best in the mass market.

Gallup says Cymbidiums are "one of the cheapest flowers to have" because they have a longer life in the vase than other types of flowers. Gallup sees much potential for orchids in the mass market, because many customers have not had orchids presented to them in the mass retail market.

"A lot of people have never even had an orchid corsage," Gallup says. He believes the potential for orchid sales is great and that the retail market is "on the brink of expanding."

Gallup, too, believes the popularity of orchids will increase as they are used in more arrangements. In addition, Gallup says, "I would like to see orchids available on a year-round basis."

Another way to offer orchids is as a potted plant. "We're seeing a lot more use of orchid plants in the home," Gallup says. "This is an expanding area. They're very expensive, but the flowers last a long time." Cymbidium blooms on the plant can last four to six weeks or more, Gallup says.

Gallup offers the following tips to retailers to help them maximize their orchid sales:

- **Promote them.** Put them on ad whenever possible, especially in four-color ads.
- **Be sure to have enough orchids in stock during the peak selling times,** such as around Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Easter.
- **Always have orchids in the department and offer them throughout the year.** □

Below are care and handling tips compiled from recommendations by Gallup, Hausermann and Laird:

nanas, other types of fruit and any decaying matter.

- **Don't place orchids with other flowers that produce ethylene gas such as snapdragons. Also,**