



## HAWK HILL ORCHIDS

Excerpt from *Odontoglossum Alliance Newsletter* – May 2012

### DOGGY BARK GOODBYE!

by Robert Hamilton, Hawk Hill Orchids

About this same time, Tom Perlite of Golden Gate Orchids, was testing a new bark product from New Zealand sold under the name Orchiata – [www.besgrow.com](http://www.besgrow.com)

I had heard good things about this product from friends in Australia and New Zealand. We decided to purchase a pallet of bark from Tom. The bark came as a mixed lot with bags of both fine (#9) and medium (#5, aka “Power”). Orchiata is made from 100% New Zealand *Pinus Radiata* bark, a renewable product derived from tree farms. Orchiata advertises their bark goes through a special process which creates “a renewable high quality, stable, long lasting, toxin free, consistent growing substrate”.

They further claim their bark supports helpful organisms and suppresses pathogens. I have found it a harder, denser bark than fir bark and it wets nicely.

I decided to make a 100% switch to Orchiata. This year I have finally completely this task. All of my plants are in Orchiata bark and to say that I am pleased with their growing is an understatement! I would go so far as to say ecstatic. Orchiata is performing superbly and two of my colleagues who were skeptical at first have now switched to Orchiata bark. I have tried it straight, mixed with “red lava rock”, a rock from a local landscaping supply and with a bark, lava, charcoal blend. When supplementing bark with another material such as rock, one has to use care to select a material with the same size, so one does not fill up the “open space” of the mix.

For this last year’s potting, I have added a cup of oyster shell flour, a product sold to the poultry industry. This is a trick I learned from Jerry Rodder, a superb local grower and the patent holder for “Jerry’s Grow” fertilizer. A visit to Jerry’s greenhouse where he has “with” and “without” oyster is pretty convincing.

So far the bark has lasted two years with no signs of decay. Root growth is phenomenal. I have stopped using the #9 fine bark for mature plants and am using only the #5, Power. The pure bark mix and the bark with lava rock (of about the same size) both grow well. The lava adds weight to the pots which is useful in keeping pots from getting tipped when watering. Adding about a cup of oyster remains an experiment, but appears to be beneficial. The concept is oyster shell, which is virtually pure calcium carbonate, acts as a pH buffer helping to maintain the substrate at a constant pH. I have nixed using any charcoal whatsoever as it seems to offer no benefits. It has inconsistent size and is nasty stuff to work with. (Note: Andy Easton recommends gypsum for the same purposes and he finds it superior to oyster.)

After my change to Orchiata, I have seen an immediate improvement in my collection. Leaf color has improved to a dark, verdant green. This also holds true for the *masdevallias* John Leathers grows in the same greenhouse after he moved them into Orchiata. Prior to Orchiata, his *coccinea*’s had become alarmingly chlorotic in the fir bark we were using. My odont bulbs are fat and turgid. Their roots are the best I have ever seen them in my 30 years of growing. John and I are sold on Orchiata. Using it also pays off in the reduced need to repot saving time and material – well worth the extra cost of this media.

I’ll close by stating I am sold and a zealous proselyte for Orchiata bark. I’ve recently become aware there’s another importer of New Zealand *Pinus Radiata* bark. It is sold by a different supplier. I have no experience with this product. I do know it is not prepared in the same manner as Orchiata. *Caveat Emptor*.

I wholly endorse Orchiata bark.

Given its long pot life and clean, uniform character, right out of the bag, you won’t go wrong.