

# Der Vogelfänger

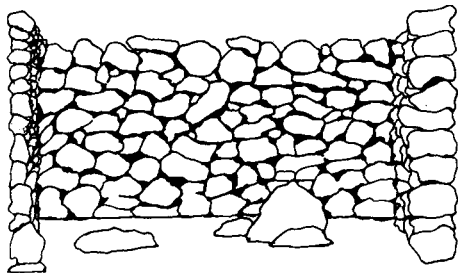
by Joseph G. Griffith

## EPIPHYTIC GARDEN

This is the last in the series of planted aviaries. Although not all of the plants in this kind of garden are truly epiphytes (those that grow on trees), they are the principle feature of the garden, hence the name. Since most of the plants of this type are tropical or sub-tropical, those who live in the northern half of the country will need a greenhouse in which to plant such a garden. Plants from very tropical areas will need a greenhouse in the southern half of the country also, although there are a number of epiphytes that are sub-tropical.

Next to a fair consistency of temperature, the plants will need some shading. Lath is readily available everywhere for this purpose. Another material is Saran, a plastic used by nurserymen for lath houses which is woven in various densities. Generally, 50% shade should serve the purpose.

Since none of the plants will be grown in pots, a growing medium to which the plants can attach their roots is needed. Dead logs are generally used, however they rot and must be replaced. About the most permanent material is feather rock. This is a very porous rocklike substance found in many aquarium shops. A rock of about two cubic feet can be easily lifted. The hundreds of small holes will aid in retaining water and the surface is rough enough to provide a good purchase for most epiphytes. It is soft enough to permit a home made staple of medium gauge wire to be driven in to anchor a plant firmly until it has had a chance to establish itself. This allows you to put plants anywhere, rather than being



confined to crevices. The rocks can be arranged around three walls of the aviary to form a grotto. The grotto should open toward the south to maximize the light.

Rather than a conventional green or lath house, I would suggest a large lean-to style. The highest point of the roof should be at the front. A greenhouse of this style can be made in such a way that the entire front can be folded back or removed during spring and summer. The pitch of the roof will depend on the amount of snow that your area gets in winter. The use of a few heavy roof supports rather than a number of lighter supports will present a neater appearance.

Basically, the epiphytes that will interest most people fall into four plant families: Cacti, Bromeliads, Ferns and Orchids. Many of these plants grow in groups together to their mutual benefit. There are some others, for instance epiphytic Camellias and Azaleas, but they are difficult to obtain.

Water here may be a problem. Many of the plants that grow on trees and rocks are adapted to long dry periods, others are not. Orchids with pseudobulbs (fleshy, bulb-like swellings of the leaf stems) are drought adapted and those that lack them need more consistent moisture. Moist Orchid Cacti (*Epiphyllums*) are more or less drought tolerant. Some of the ferns go dormant in the dry season and many Bromeliads form water retaining cups with their leaves. Probably the best arrangement is to place the drought tolerant plants higher in the more exposed positions and the moisture lovers lower. The latter frequently require more shade, so this is a workable rule. Water should be overhead and in the form of a fine spray. Watering should be done as INFREQUENTLY as possible. The general rule, which I have given elsewhere, is that a little water is worse than none at all and that when you water, you should give lots of it at one time. A three or four minute daily spray should not be confused with watering. Such spraying raises the humidity and is generally beneficial, but does little to sustain the plants in the long run.

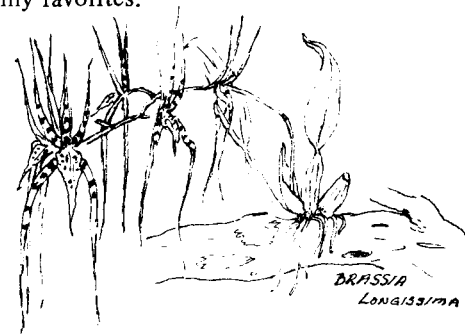
Some free standing boulders can be set toward the front and some of the choicer epiphytes put on these so that you have an unrestricted view of them. All of these plants have terrestrial counterparts and you are free to use them in the ground to complete the picture. The rule of planting some of the larger plants toward the front to add a sense of depth can be ignored here. Many of the plants are expensive and you will want to be able to see them, especially when they are blooming.

You may mix other kinds of plants with those that I will mention and some of those that come to mind are Tuberous Begonias, Gloxinias, African Violets, etc.

## EPIPHYTES

*Epiphyllum* ssp. ORCHID CACTI. This is a very large group of plants that have been much improved by hybridizing. The predominating colors are red, orange, yellow, and white. Flowers tend to be large and trumpet shaped. A large, well grown specimen plant in full bloom is a very impressive sight. Among the smaller varieties are Christmas and Easter Cacti. You won't find these listed by species names so much as by named varieties.

*Orchidaceae* spp., ORCHIDS. Here is an enormous group of both species and named varieties and hybrids. The epiphytes are pretty much limited to the tropics and sub-tropics, and they are legion. Here, I will mention some of the commonly known kinds among which are some of my favorites.



*Brassia* ssp. The flowers of this genus tend to run to yellows and yellow-greens with darker spotting in the sepals and petals. Flowers are numerous and average about two inches across.

*Brassavola* ssp. Both flowers and leaves are often drooping in this genus. Flowers are predominantly white and many of them have some frilling on the lip. Flowers are very variable in form.

*Cattleya* ssp. and hybrids. These are the Orchids best known for corsages. Form is reasonably consistent, but size ranges from less than an inch to as much as seven inches across. Colors are everything but blue, although if memory serves, there is a species *Cattleya* that is blueish. Some attention has been given lately to those that are hardy outside and it is surprising how many there are.

*Laelia* ssp. *Laelia anceps* is the best known of this genus and has been used extensively for hybridizing with *Cattleyas*. The form is similar and colors are white or purple. This is a very tough plant.

*Oncidium* ssp. "DANCING LADIES". Flowers in this genus tend to be small but numerous. Yellow is the predominant color with flecks of green and/or brown. The "lip" is usually unmarked and is spread in such a way that it suggests the skirt of a nineteenth century lady. Flowers are borne in loose sprays of

sometimes hundreds.

*Odontoglossum* spp., **TOOTHED ORCHIDS**. Most of the *Odontoglossum*s are "cool" Orchids; the majority from high in the Andes where flowers and plants often enjoy frost. Flowers are frequently patterned with contrasting colors and crinkled at the edges. They are difficult to obtain, but *Odontoglossum grande* from Mexico is usually available.

*Epidendrum* spp. Some of the *Epidendrum*s are among the most heavily scented flowers that I know of. *E. Choclatum* has small greenish flowers that are dotted with brown, the lip white with purple lines, the lip edges heavily crinkled. In sunlight, this plant will fill a greenhouse with the scent of chocolate. Other *epidendrum*s are either bulblike or reed-stemmed. The reed-stem kinds can be grown in the ground or as epiphytes.

*Phalaenopsis*, **MOTH ORCHIDS**. White or rose-pink are the colors. Flowers alternate on long sprays. The colors are deep; as if you could strip off successive layers, all with the same color. These plants require more shade and water, plus fairly warm temperatures.

*Dendrobium* spp. Sprays of tissue paper flowers in a variety of colors. Unfortunately, the flowers are very susceptible to smog damage.

*Cymbidium canaliculatum*. Although there are other kinds of epiphytic *Cymbidium*s, this is my favorite. An Australian plant, it should do well in the warmer parts of the Southwest. Small reddish flowers are numerous on long spikes. This is one of the parents of many of the new "miniature *Cymbidium*s".

*Angraecum* spp. Small to medium flowers that are mainly white. Some of the *Angraecum*s are scented. Natives of Asia as far north as Japan, they should be good subjects for almost anyone.

*Bromeliads* range from tiny miniatures to plants 12 feet high. A rarely cultivated member of this family is Spanish Moss. In parts of Mexico, it is used in place of lath for shade. Grown on chicken wire, it is thinned when too dense. Moisture from the plants below keeps it growing. One of the most commonly grown *Bromeliads* is *Billbergia nutans*. It is frequently used as a pot plant but can be grown epiphytically in suitable situations. Another epiphyte usually grown in soil is *Tillandsia lindeniana*. Its deep violet-blue flowers are borne one or two at a time, but there are new ones coming on over a long period. Many of the *Bromeliad* inflorescences combine colors not often seen together, for example bright pink and blue.

Ferns are less frequently epiphytic, but there are some. Staghorn and Elk-

horn ferns are pretty well known and are dramatic when well grown. Rabbit's-foot-fern is a commonly available epiphyte that will lend a softening texture to the stiffer leaves of the other plants.

### TERRESTRIALS

There are not many wet country terrestrial Cacti, but some of the *Epiphyllum*s can be grown in the ground. You will have to look for those that have a more upright growth, because most of them tend to droop.

Among the *Orchids* are all of the *Natives* mentioned in earlier chapters. *Cymbidiums*, *Tropical Lady's Slippers*, some *Angraecum*s and *Vandas* are among those that can be grown in the ground. Watch the *Vandas*; they tend to grow rank. The tops of ungainly plants can be cut off with some arial roots and planted.

Not many of the *Bromeliads* are truly terrestrial but among those that are is the *Pineapple*. This is one of the cheapest plants available. Merely cut the leafy top from a *Pineapple* and plant it.


Ferns present a problem only with regard to size and how invasive they are. *Boston Fern* is one of the invasive ones. *Leather fern* is a beautiful plant that will take full sun when established. Very large ferns, tree ferns, will block the view too much and should be avoided unless the aviary is really big.

### BIRDS

Birds for this kind of situation are more limited than for some others, yet the selection isn't all that bad. *Hummingbirds*, *Sunbirds* and *Tanagers* come to mind first. Do not put *Australian finches* into this aviary, it is too damp and they will suffer! *Tropical Thrushers*, *Leafbirds*, *Antbirds*, *Kingfishers*, *Broadbills*, *Cotingas*, *Manakins*, *Bee-eaters*, *Woodhoopoes*, *Bare-eyes*, *Antbirds* and *Ovenbirds* are suited to an epiphytic garden.

A final word about planted aviaries. As mentioned previously, the numbers of birds must be severely limited and the kinds of birds must be compatible. Sick or dead birds are often difficult to find. In the case of sick birds, this means that you probably won't be able to do them any good and they will have to recover on their own if that is possible. Except where there are only about three pairs of birds in an aviary, breeding production is not always as high as would be expected or desired.

On the other hand, planted aviaries can be a delight. They, and the birds in them, present a natural and beautiful picture that is restful on the one hand and can be exciting, through its activity, on the other. ■



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