

GROWING VANDA (NEOFINETIA) FALCATA: AN INTERVIEW WITH SATOMI KASAHARA

PHYLLIS PRESTIA

Neofinetia falcata

THE SANTA BARBARA AREA is beautiful in the summer. Mild ocean breezes bathe the coast under a warm California sun. For orchid lovers, it's a paradise. July brings the annual open houses for two of the area orchid nurseries, Santa Barbara Orchid Estate and Cal-Orchid Inc. And for me, it brings an opportunity to attend the meeting of the Fūkiran Society of America and the annual Fūkiran judging, supported by the Japanese Fūkiran Society. For several years, the meeting and judging have been held on the property of Cal-Orchid Inc. on Saturday during the annual open house weekend. This year they were held on July 14th, and this year I entered a few of my own *Vanda falcata* orchids.

The American Fūkiran Society was established in 2012 as an offshoot of the Japan Fūkiran Society. According to the website (<http://fukiransoa.weebly.com/>), the "mission of the society is to promote the growing of Fūkiran in the United States and Canada, as well as around the world." The currently accepted name for these orchids, according to "The World Checklist of Selected Plant Families," is *Vanda falcata*. Many of those who love these orchids still call them by their synonym, *Neofinetia falcata*; in Japan, they are known as Fūkiran. I have an affection for these charming little orchids, and in this article, I will refer to them as *Neofinetia falcata*.

Seed Engei

Shigeru Kasahara has been active in the Fūkiran Society in Japan for over 25 years and currently serves as the Chairman, an honored position. It was his friend's grandfather who gave him his first orchid, *Dendrobium moniliforme* and stirred his interest in native Japanese orchids. Shigeru loved plants, but Japanese orchids had grabbed his heart. Eventually, Shigeru concentrated mostly on growing Fūkiran and sold them in his newly established flower shop. In 1983, he established Seed Engei, a Japanese nursery which promotes and sells native Japanese orchids and their hybrids.

In the early 2000s, Shigeru visited the United States. He met Jason Fischer at his nursery, Orchids Limited (Orchid Web.com) in Plymouth, Minnesota and the late Dr. Glenn Lehr, then owner of New World Orchids located in Manchester, Michigan, both vendors of Japanese orchids. It was when he attended the Santa Barbara summer fair held at the Earl Warren Fairgrounds that he realized the climate in Southern California was perfect for growing Japanese orchids. Warm and sunny during the day and cooler at night year-round. Shortly afterward, Seed Engei, USA was launched. Satomi Kasahara, Shigeru's daughter, was the perfect one to open the business; she had worked in her father's busi-



Shigeru Kasahara and Satomi judging *Neofinetia falcata*.

ness in Japan prior to attending school in the States. Satomi would be the one to bring Fūkiran to California.

Climate

The weather in Japan is generally very hot in summer and very cold in winter. Summer temperatures can go as high as 90°F (20°C), and winter temperatures average from 25 to 35°F (-3 to 1.7°C). Winter is quite dry while summer is humid and rainy; however, the temperature is more temperate where neofinetias grow.

Satomi has experienced *Neofinetia falcata* in situ in the mountains of Japan. She says these cooler growing orchids are always located high up in the trees in a spot above a creek. Because of the altitude, even the warm, humid, sunny days of summer are cool in the



Dendrobium moniliforme 'Shokkonishiki' grown by Seed Engei.



Neofinetia falcata horticultural variety Taiga was the first-place winner at the Santa Barbara Fūkiran judging.



Neofinetia falcata growing in situ.



Cymbidium goeringii

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Placing plants close together raises the humidity.

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Plants are placed on pipes and raised racks.

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evenings. During the day, the leafy branches provide cooling shade from the heat of the summer sunlight. In winter, these mountains rarely get snow, and the temperature rarely dips close to freezing. Further, the trees in winter have dropped their leaves, letting the less intense winter sunlight through to the orchids growing on the exposed branches. Once Satomi visited a man who lives close to the mountains who told the story of a seed blown by the wind that landed on his tree. Satomi says, "that tree is now covered with Fūkiran." These mountain conditions are the ideal habitat for growing this species of orchid.

Seed Engei, USA is located in Santa Barbara, California. Situated in the moderate climate of Southern California where *Neofinetia falcata* can easily grow outdoors, she prefers to grow her orchids in a greenhouse under more controlled climate conditions, ensuring a more consistent product. Even so, some conditions need to be adjusted to grow these orchids well.

Although temperature is not a problem, there are challenges in dealing with the less than ideal water quality in Southern California. High concentrations of calcium and other solids can cause build-up on roots and the moss used in the Japanese-style wrapping of the plants. She prefers to use filtered water to prevent build-up.

Within the same greenhouse, Satomi grows *Neofinetia falcata*, *Dendrobium moniliforme*, *Cymbidium goeringii*, and other Japanese native orchids. She controls the temperature with a heater on one side of a long greenhouse and a swamp cooler on the other. Plants are arranged in micro-climates within based on their climatic needs. *Dendrobium moniliforme* and *Cymbidium goeringii* are placed closer to the swamp cooler to provide the cooler temperature and higher humidity they require. *Neofinetia falcata*, which requires a more intermediate climate, is grown on the warmer side along the length of the greenhouse.

Satomi reminds me that she finds *Neofinetia falcata* growing over a stream in situ. To slightly increase the amount of humidity, she grows her *Neofinetia falcata* close to each other to maintain a more consistent humidity level. In addition, she suspends them on parallel pipes and raised racks, so the pots hang Japanese style.

Light levels are also a challenge. Although the temperate climate is similar to the conditions in Japan, the strong sunlight in Southern California is much too bright for growing *Neofinetia falcata*. Satomi has experimented with different percentages of shade cloth. She claims that "after one year of growing in Santa Barbara, the variegation on some of the leaves was fading." Also apparent on others was "a black stain on the leaves," the tell-tale sign of sunburn. To compensate for the strong sunlight, she now changes the shade cloth seasonally, using 50% during winter and 75% during summer.

Different variegations on the leaves of these orchids are affected differently by sunlight. In general, variegated varieties benefit from more light than non-var-



Neofinetia falcata horticultural variety Tenkei with yellow stripes.



Neofinetia falcata horticultural variety Yaegoromo displaying the white stripes.

iegated. Specifically, the yellow-striped type requires stronger sun to maintain the strength of the yellow color. Conversely, the white-striped type requires shadier conditions to prevent the white color from fading. Satomi uses 50% shade cloth for yellow-striped varieties and 75% shade cloth for white-striped varieties. She recommends observing the variegated types and adjusting the level of sun accordingly.

Culture

Satomi's instructions on how to grow Japanese orchids is published on the Seed Engei website: www.seed-engei.com. Highlights from the interview and website are summarized here.

Water and Humidity

- Use filtered water if possible. If using tap water, regularly flush by allowing water to run freely over the roots.
- Always check the sphagnum moss or potting media for dryness before watering.
- Summer is warm and humid in Japan. This is the growing season for these orchids, so water regularly at least two to three times per week.
- During cooler months, water less frequently but at least once per week. Water less if growing in humid conditions.
- Growing plants closer together will increase the humidity levels between plants.
- If growing in a dry area, supplement with misting.
- *Neofinetia falcata* benefit from a short, dry rest in winter.

Fertilizer

- *Neofinetia falcata* are not heavy feeders.
- Fertilize lightly when in growth during the warmer weather. Fertilize less in cooler weather.

Light and Air Movement

- *Neofinetia falcata* prefer cool, shady conditions in general. Use 65-75% shade cloth in summer and 50-55% shade cloth in winter. The key to success is a bright location where plants will get plenty of filtered, diffused light.
- Adjust light level when growing variegated varieties; higher light for yellow variegation, lower light for white variegation.
- Moderate temperatures are best, so avoid freezing temperatures. Increase watering and misting when temperatures are higher than normal.
- For the best culture, the growing area needs to have good air movement.

Potting Mix and Pots

- Satomi prefers to wrap Japanese orchids in the Japanese fashion using sphagnum moss. Instructions for the process can be found on the Fūkiran Society of American website (www.fukiransoa.weebly.com) under "Repotting Fūkiran."

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- *Neofinetia falcata* culture information can also be found on the Orchids Limited website (www.orchidweb.com). Click on "Orchid Care" and then on "Neofinetia."
- Satomi prefers to use black plastic Japanese pots with large slits down the sides. Ceramic pots can be used to increase humidity to roots. Any pot which provides good drainage can be used.
- If using a potting mix, maintain good drainage with three parts bark and one-part inorganics such as perlite, pumice, or stone.

Repotting and Dividing

- *Neofinetia falcata* can be repotted any time.
- Repot or rewrap every one to two years but before the media begins to sour or break down.

Satomi's Caveats for the Hobbyist

- *Neofinetia falcata* are tough little plants that can tolerate a wide range of growing conditions. Adjust your growing conditions to more closely meet their conditions in situ and you will be a successful grower.
- During the colder, winter months keep the plants on the dry side. Test for dryness by inserting a finger into the media.
- When in growth during warmer weather, water according to the temperature. During periods of high heat, water more often, two to three times per week in summer. Mist when needed in dry conditions.
- *Neofinetia falcata* are relatively pest resistant. Treat any pest infestations quickly to avoid spread to other plants. Your local nursery can assist in selecting the correct pesticide or method.
- Do not let the media break down, causing damage to the roots.

At the conclusion of the interview, I said my good-byes to Satomi and her father and gathered the orchids I had entered in this year's Fūkiran judging. My orchid,

Neofinetia falcata horticultural variety Sekirei was honored with the third-place prize, a beautiful Japanese pot made by a Japanese artisan, a gift supported by the Japanese Fūkiran Society. I have no doubt I'll enter an orchid using that pot in next year's judging, and I now have Satomi's recommendations for culture to help with the growing.✿

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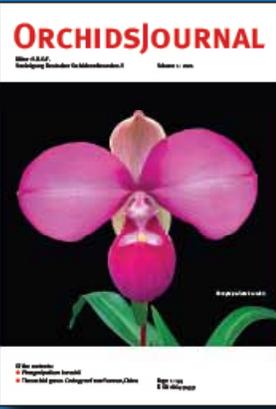
About the Author



Phyllis S. Prestia started growing orchids once she retired as an educator and Middle School Principal and moved from New Jersey to sunny, Southern California. She is currently a member of the Editorial Board of the Orchid Digest and serves as Trustee for the American Orchid Society. She has been the President of the San Diego County Cymbidium Society and is the current Vice President

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