

A promising new planting material

EpiWeb

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In my article about fern roots as planting material (Orkidéer May 2005 side 2) I spoke highly about old favourite number one planting material, *Osmunda*. More specifically the roots from the fern *Osmunda regalis*. The fern was over used to the point of extinction. It was replaced with fern fibres from the tree fern *Dicksonia spp.*, which now is on the red list and prohibited for trade.

Now our own Micke (Mikael Karlbom) has invented a solution, a Chinese plastic fibre. The fibre was initially used for scourers. Micke has, in cooperation with the Chinese factory modified the fibre. It is now coarser, and at the same time more porous, thus allowing high absorption.

He has imported and tested the material for 2 years and is now marketing it under the name EpiWeb.

I have heard about it before but have been a bit sceptic pending the test results.

Test results are now available, and when I visited him just after New Year, I was completely convinced.

It seems that this amazing “fly trap” is able to catch, not only two, but maybe five, six or even more flies at the same time.

Advantages:

1. The fibres are about the same diameter as *osmunda* roots. *Dicksonia* fibres are coarser, and the finer dimension is a big advantage, especially for miniature orchids
2. The fibres can hold up to 80% of its own weight in water enabling it to moisten roots and at the same time facilitates excellent aeration. EpiWeb has a pH around 7, neutral. Also an advantage.
3. The fibres don't de-compose, are inert and can be re-used time after time when disinfected, preferably in boiling water or in a microwave oven.
4. The fibres are sold both in small pieces (10 x 10 x 10 mm and 20 x 20 x 20 mm) and in big sheets (up to 2000 x 1000 mm). Due to the fact that the fibres are unequal in shape they stick to each other unlike the earlier mentioned *Dicksonia* fibres. It is almost as if the material has small hooks. This means that the clump of material you have around the roots holds, resulting in a firm stand for the plant. Another advantage to this, is that the plant can be dipped in water, without the material floating, as in bark, which floats all over the place.
5. If you plant on slabs of EpiWeb you can lengthen the slabs just by gluing a new slab to the side of the old one. This means that you don't need to disturb a plant that has outgrown its slab.
6. The orchids like to grow into the moist retaining material. A couple of examples are seen in the pictures where you can compare two plants that have been divided and planted. One in EpiWeb, the other in traditional compost.
7. When you mount a plant onto EpiWeb, it's easy to fix it with round wooden tooth picks. You can also cut a slit and plant it there. The plant will shortly root and the toothpicks can be removed. You therefore don't need to use ugly pantyhose strings, fishing nylon or plastic coated wire any more.

8. As if this wasn't enough, it seems that EpiWeb has a repellent effect on slugs and fungus gnats. Mikael observed that slugs left baby plants, potted in EpiWeb in peace.

He then used a control experiment where he put 10-12 slugs in a covered plastic box together with a couple of delicious orchid plants. After 3 weeks they had not touched roots or leaves!

Fungus gnats are not as harmful to orchids as slugs. But many consider them annoying and irritating, especially in living rooms. Apparently they don't like the EpiWeb. EpiWeb can possibly be a solution even here.

Disadvantages:

1. Up to now, I have found only one disadvantage. EpiWeb is very light. Therefore you need to weigh down a plastic pot with small stones. Or why not use old fashioned terracotta pieces.

2. As a disadvantage you might experience that the material is fast drying, requiring frequent watering in summer time. This is compensated by the fact that it's almost impossible to over water. The very airy structure makes excess water run off, leaving only the water absorbed by the fibre itself.

You might object to the price. But to me it is reasonable, with 17 Kr/litre for the small pieces and 17 kr for a slab of 12 x 25 x 2 cm. But if I should plant each of my orchids it would be expensive. But, on the other hand, cork bark and Greenmix is also costly. So the objection weighs lightly when you consider that EpiWeb is re-usable over and over again.

When the volume increases, the price should go down.

It is possible that other negative things evolve after prolonged use. But I consider the material extremely promising. As a matter of fact, the most promising since the new Greenmix came out.

The problem with Greenmix is that you must not forget to water it, because it must never dry out.

The EpiWeb obviously doesn't have this disadvantage.

There aren't big quantities in the country at the time of writing this, but a full container is on its way from China, where the fibre is made.

I have planted several orchids in EpiWeb. In six months I will report the result.

For more information, go to www.dusk.se/epiweb.html

Try it yourself. Good luck!



*Epiweb is sold in two different forms. In substrate and in plates of different sizes.
The EpiWeb plates works also as backgrounds in vivariums.
Both substrate and plates are available in both brown and black.*



A plant of Dracula inaequalis was divided and planted in Epiweb (left) and the other part in ordinary bark compost (right) After three months the plant in Epiweb is a lot bigger.



Same experiment with a divided plant of the specie Kefersteinia graminea. Three and a half month later the plant in Epiweb is definitely bigger. What the picture does not show is that this plant in EpiWeb is thicker in the leaves, compared to the other plant, which has a more weak structure.



*Close up of the Kefersteinia graminea in EpiWeb.
It has even produced a new division.*



The roots of the Kefersteinia. Several new fresh roots have developed and it is obvious that the plant is in good growth.



A bad plant of Prosthechea vitellina has after only three weeks in EpiWeb started to grow new roots.