



THE MONTHLY BULLETIN OF THE KU-RING-GAI ORCHID SOCIETY INC.

(Established in 1947)
A.B.N. 92 531 295 125

Aug 2017 Volume 58 No. 8
Annual Membership : \$12 single, \$15 family

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web site : <http://kuringaiorchidsociety.org.au>

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Next Meeting : Monday, 21st August, 2017

Venue : The Lindfield Community Centre, corner of Bradfield Rd and Moore Avenue, West Lindfield.

The **Culture Class** this month (**7.15pm**) will be **Trish Peterson** and her subject **How and where to best grow a variety of Australian native orchids**. Trish is a past President of the Warringah group of the Australian Native Orchid Society and has a real passion and love for these wonderful orchids, not to mention a wealth of knowledge. This should be interesting. Get in early for a front row seat.

The **Main meeting commences at 8pm**. Our **guest speaker** this month is **Jody Cutajar** and his subject “**an Orchid Roadtrip in Brazil**”. Jody has given presentations a number of times to our Society and is a wonderful speaker. He has travelled widely, takes terrific pictures and video clips, and never fails to give us an entertaining and information filled evening. Make sure you don't miss a real treat.

Our **super volunteers** for July are **Seb Torrisi** and **Janet Snodgrass**. Thank you for your help.

Best of Evening Novice – Oncostele Midnight Miracles (?) Masai Red - grown by Angie Lyle

What a lovely orchid, and aren't some of our newer growers like Angie growing their orchids just so well.

My apologies to our photographers, but this picture is one from my library stock rather than a picture of Angie's plant on the night. The dark colour makes this a very hard flower to capture at night.

This stunningly coloured orchid is one of a group believed to have been mass produced in Holland some years back and marketed under the trade name “Masai Red”. However, a few colour mutations showed up in the production process, and two of these mutants were also mass produced and sold as separate products traded as Masai Pink, and Masai Splash. There was always suspicion that the whole group were really man made tetraploids mass produced as mericlones from the cross of *Rhynchostele bictoniensis* x *Onc cariniferum*, registered back in 1983 as *Odontoglossum Midnight Miracles*.

In 2012, the Registrar's notes in the quarterly supplement to the International Register and Checklist of orchid hybrids (Sanders List), contained the following concerning Masai Red. :- “*This clone has been distributed for many years under several invalid labels, including x Colmanara Masai 'Red', and x Colmanara Masai Red, both of which are regarded as trade designations, and were apparently*



Masai Pink

Masai Splash

originated by a Dutch wholesaler as marketing devices. Last year, 2012, Ron McHatton of the AOS, identified these clones as belonging to Midnight Miracles grex (Rhynchostele bictoniensis x Oncidium cariniferum). Now that this and the following clone have been identified, the trade designations are here adopted and established as cultivar epithets”

As the bictonense species is now a *Rhynchostele* (it was an *Odontoglossum*), the correct genus name for the orchid is *Oncostele*. However, whatever name you give it, it is by far the darkest, most stunningly coloured orchid I have seen.

Congratulations on your Best of the Evening Angie. Well done.

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Society News (if anyone has a news item, please phone Jim on 9476 3383, or email at jimbrydie@bigpond.com)

1. 70th Anniversary Celebrations – our celebrations last month went very well. President Kevin Crocker offers his personal special thank you to everyone who participated, and to those who helped make it such a success.

We had an excellent turn up, members contributed with wonderful and different finger food and cakes for our supper, Dennys produced an amazing set of charts showing benching trends in each class over a period of years, there were colour pictures of various social events going back about 15 years & bulletins dating back to the 1970's. We also had a special bumper raffle with extra plants and a couple of fancy baskets of treats (one crackers, chips and nuts, one biscuits and chocolate etc) all provided by the society, and also some extra donated plants.

At the meeting, President Kevin read out some of the minutes from when our society first began. It was fascinating to hear how it all began so long ago. at the break, everyone wandered around discussing the memorabilia and the fantastic orchids that were benched. We really are lucky to get such an amazing array of beautiful orchids to admire every month – we have some very good growers at our society, and specialists in so many different areas. Every month it is a real treat to see them.



Keith Oxley cutting our special cake

2. New Member – *Maya Lak* has just joined our society. Welcome to our collection of mad orchid lovers Maya. We hope you will enjoy our meetings and join in with our activities and find friends among us. Sometimes it takes a little time so I hope you will be patient. Everyone please try to make Maya welcome.

3. Changes to your email address or home address? – It is a fact of modern life that people move or change email addresses from time to time, for example NBN. If this happens to you, please think of us when you update your details with your friends and contacts. We can't send you information if we don't have current details for you.

4. St Ives Orchid Fair - **We are one of the 4 clubs that run this fair and we also put on one of the displays in the display hall. – This is your show .. We need your Support and your Help**



***** **THE ST IVES ORCHID FAIR** *****

'The Big One'

Friday 18th August, 9-4pm, - Saturday 19th August, 9-4pm, - Sunday 20th August, 9-3pm
massive orchid displays, floral art, painting & photography categories available. Interstate and International Orchid vendors.

Get your plants ready, make sure you get there

**** THIS IS OUR SHOW - GET INVOLVED - MAKE SURE EVERYONE ENJOYS ORCHIDS ****

Special request : we need some extra workers to set up the halls on wed from 10.30am. Bring a sandwich for lunch but there will be tea and coffee available. If you can help, just show up at the halls at the grounds on wednesday

At the risk of being a trifle repetitive, but just to make sure no-one missed any of this information before :

(a) **Plants for our display** - We know that many of our members also belong to other societies. Many traditionally support the 'other' society in displays, **but can we ask even those to find a couple of plants for us as well?**

Offering your plants for our display is entirely voluntary of course, but the number of members currently contributing plants to our displays is alarmingly small compared to the number of members who bench every month at meetings. Come on people, we are all in this together, let's have a go.

Set up day is Thursday and we need both flowers and foliage. They need to be there by 9am Thursday 17th Aug.

For members who have trouble getting their plants to the show, we have some capacity to transport them for you but if you can get them there yourself it is very helpful and we would appreciate it. **However, if you do need help to get your plants there, please phone Trevor Onslow on 9477 3516, or Kevin Crocker on 9484 7072, to see what arrangements can be made.**

(b) **If you are displaying orchids, no matter how they are getting there, we need you to fill in a "nomination form"** (supplied with last months bulletin, and again this month). It is a simple sheet to record your name and the names of your orchids, to ensure that we know who owns which plants when they are judged. If you happen to win a prize, it also makes sure we know who to give the money and/or the prize cards or ribbons to.

(c) **You also need to mark each pot clearly with your name or initials** so that it comes back to you. Most of us use removable labels available from office supply stores but painters masking tape is also good. Put it on the back, away from where the flowers face and write your name or initials boldly and clearly. The pull down process on Sunday can be a mad-house, so labelled pots are a must to help us quickly sort which plants belong to whom.

(d) **Grooming your plants** - Finally, to show off your plants to their best, please trim off dead or badly damaged leaves, and stake the flowers so that they stand up properly and face the viewer as best you can.

(e) **Selling Plants** - If you want to sell plants, each plant must be clean, disease free, and established, and have a yellow sales tag marked clearly with the selling price, your name or initials and KOS to identify which society you belong to. Take your sales plants to the combined societies sales table during the show. 15% commission applies

(f) **Art Entries** – There is no formal entry form. Anyone submitting an entry, please call Bernie Britton on 9451 9144

President Kevin expresses his appreciation to all those members who have volunteered to assist at the St Ives Fair. **The volunteer roster is published below.** If you have not volunteered already but can assist on any of the days of the fair, just turn up and see Val Houley inside the front door of the Vendors Hall and she will allocate you a task.

5. Knox Grammar School Spring Festival day – Fri 8 Sept. Gillespie sport field, Bangalla Street, Warrawee – Open to the public from 9.30am to 2pm. Once more we are holding a stall at this event, to promote our club, and orchid growing as a hobby. Just a small display, a potting demonstration, some plants for sale, and lots of orchid culture sheets to hand out. Parking could be a problem if you are transporting plants so if any member has a few plants they wish to sell would they please contact Kevin Crocker on 9484 7072 or Jim Brydie on 9476 3383 to make arrangements.

St Ives Volunteer Rosters (showing Kuringai Orchid Society members only).

All helpers to see Val Houley (at front door of Vendors Hall) - She will supply you with a pass and assign duties

Friday 18 th August		Sat. 19 th August		Sun. 20 th August	
9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 4.00pm	9.00am to 12.30 pm	12.30pm to 4.00pm	9.00am to 12.00 pm	12.00pm to 3.00pm
Kevin Crocker	Janine Angove	Kevin Crocker	Jim Brydie	Cynthia Brydie	Janine Angove
Jessie Koh	Dennys Angove	Trevor Miller	Kevin Crocker	Jim Brydie	Dennys Angove
Jeanne Lam	Kevin Crocker	Betty Ng	Chris Griffin	Kevin Crocker	Kevin Crocker
Mary Mathews	Bob Ellis	Chris Nidagal	Shirley Griffin	Lisa Harris	Bob Ellis
Chris Nidagal	Lisa Harris	Trevor Onslow	Jessie Koh	Trevor Onslow	Jessie Koh
Trevor Onslow	Jeanne Lam	Christine Rethers	Trevor Onslow		Graeme Mohr
Christine Rethers	Trevor Miller		Bob Taffel		Trevor Onslow
Jenny Richardson	Graeme Mohr		Herb Schock		Jenny Richardson
Herb Schock	Betty Ng				Herb Schock
					Chris Wilson

Diary Dates 2017

- * 11-13 Aug (fri/sat/sun), National Orchid Extravaganza (Cymbidiums), The Centre - 1 Pellitt Lane, Dural (Entry off Pellitt Lane Dural. This is a great show with many interstate sales stalls. Put it on your calendar.
- * 18-20 (fri/sat/sun), August 2017 - St Ives Orchid Fair - St Ives Showground – **“the Biggest one of all”**
- * 8 Sept (fri) – Kuringai Orchid Society stall at Knox Grammar School Garden Festival
- * 21-24 Sept (Thursday to Saturday), the combined Berowra and Kuringai Orchid society’s show at Hornsby Future : 18 - 22 July 2018, Australian AOC conference and show – Windsor (aocc2018.orchidsocietynsw.com.au)

Best of the Evening Hybrid – Lycaste Sunray ‘Sinii’ grown by *Trish Peterson*



Trish really grows her Lycastes well these days. It is a genus that had fallen into disfavour for a number of years but more recently, Trish, Chris Nidagal, and a few others have been showing us some fantastic, well grown modern Lycastes and popularity must rise.

Sunray is one of Fred Alcorns crosses, registered in 1991. The parents are Lyc. Shoalhaven, and the species Lyc. virginalis, which means that 95.3% of its genes are L. virginalis, 3% from macrophylla (which is a very close relative of virginalis anyway) and the other little bit comes from the yellow flowered L cruenta. It is essentially a line bred virginalis with a few tricks thrown in. There are 7 clones that have been awarded an AM, and three others with an HCC. Obviously this is a high quality cross.

Interestingly, of the 37 photos of different clones in Orchidwiz, 24 are pink. There are 8 which are essentially white, and the rest are white with a pink lip. Such is the spread of variation amongst seedlings in a cross. I am not an orchid judge, but I would say ‘Sinii’ is in the upper range of quality. It isn’t the best in the photo gallery, but it is nicely proportioned in a balanced way, and the petals and lip in the centre nicely accentuate your eye’s focus.

Congratulations Trish. Beautifully grown and presented. How do you do it? Perhaps another talk due here?

Cause and Effect : An Irish man who had a little too much to drink is driving home from the city one night and, of course, his car is weaving violently all over the road. A cop pulls him over. -- “So,” says the cop to the driver, “where have ya been?” ---- “Why, I’ve been to the pub of course,” slurs the drunk.

“Well,” says the cop, “it looks like you’ve had quite a few to drink this evening.”

“Ay, that I did all right,” the drunk says with a smile.

“Did you know,” says the cop, standing straight, and folding his arms across his chest, “that a few intersections back, your wife fell out of your car?” ---

“Oh, thank heavens,” sighs the drunk. “for a minute there, I thought I’d gone deaf.”

Best of the Evening Species – *Epidendrum Hugomedinae* - grown by *Lesley and Garrie Bromley*



Now here is something you don't see every day. Garrie's is the first of this species I have ever seen, and from what he tells us, it may be the first anyone has seen in Australia.

Epidendrum hugomedinae is a species from South East Ecuador at elevations around 1600 meters. Little more seems to be known of its natural habitat. In the paper describing it as a new species, Hagsater and Dobson said : "Known only from southeastern Ecuador, from the type locality reported by the collector, at 1600m altitude. Flowering in March."

This species is an epiphyte, looking pretty much like any other reed stem *Epidendrum*, but in a sharply miniature form. Garrie's plant looked to be about 30cm high in total, and I doubt it would get very much bigger. It has about 7 fleshy, alternate leaves, spread evenly over most of upper 2/3 of the cane. The lovely arching to pendent inflorescence carries a fairly dense cluster of up to 28 (10-12mm diameter) white flowers with delightful little

green and violet markings. Garrie tells us that the flowers have a delicate and pleasant perfume.

Garrie told us at the meeting that he had tried to import flowering size plants a number of times but in every case they had all died in quarantine. It seems the species is particularly sensitive to the fumigation process that is part of Australia's standard procedures to ensure that no nasty unwanted bugs get in to our luckily, isolated island continent. The plant he showed us at the meeting was raised from seedlings imported in a flask and therefore didn't have to go through the fumigation process. Perhaps in the fullness of time, seedlings will be created here from our newly established survivors and this lovely species will become more widely available.



Thanks for showing us such a rare treat Garrie, and congratulations on another BOE.

A Discussion on Media for Epiphytic Orchids (updated version 2017) – by Jim Brydie

From what I have seen on my travels, very few orchids grow in pots in nature - orchids grow on trees, on rocks, and in the ground. We put orchids in pots purely for our own convenience, which brings us to the need to provide a medium in the pot. It is impossible to reproduce an orchid's natural root environment in a pot or any other way but what we can do, in our artificial growing houses, is to provide a benign root environment with an appropriate balance of air, moisture, and mechanical support. Luckily for us, orchids are very adaptive little devils and most will take to our pot culture without too much fuss.

The balance of air and moisture in the pot seems to be the critical factor. They will all put up with being saturated temporarily when we water them but they need excess water to be shed pretty quickly. As the pot then dries out after watering, the medium needs to provide an airy but moist environment in which the roots can live and thrive. The need for moisture hardly needs explanation but keep in mind that air is an equal necessity. Roots are a living organ of the plant and they have to breathe as they work. In a well functioning medium, fresh air will be drawn into the pot as the medium dries out, and be exchanged evenly throughout the pot. There will be no stale pockets of air.

Different plants require different rates of drying out and it is this that we design into the various mixes we use. Any number of the commonly used potting materials will do the job provided that :

- you get the air/water balance within bounds acceptable to the plant concerned,
- you give the plant regular food and water,
- the mix provides a reasonable pH in which the roots can live and grow.

The latter point is very important. The recommended pH range for orchids is 6.0 to 6.5 as this optimizes the availability of the nutrient elements in the fertilizer you provide. Orchids will of course tolerate a much wider range of pH than this but some kinds of orchids are touchier than others in this regard. In my experience, the roots of some, like *Paphiopedilum* and some of the *Oncidiinae* (eg those that used to be called *Odontoglossum*), decline rapidly as the mix ages and I think this is because it gets too acid.

As I said above, many different combinations will serve adequately if other factors are right, but to improve on 'adequate' I think you need to focus on the root system. Roots are the key to maximizing growth. The bigger and more vigorous the root system, the bigger and more robust will be the rest of the plant. Fine tuning the potting medium is the way to maximize root growth and to do that you need options with your potting materials.

When you take your car to a garage for repairs you expect the mechanic to have a full set of whatever tools are necessary for the repair. Why then, do we think we can grow orchids to their potential if we only keep two kinds of bark in the potting shed. For any reasonably sized, mixed orchid collection, the range of environmental needs will be far too wide for any medium to suit all. It is my contention that we need more tools in our shed than that.

There are 4 basic potting medium components that I recommend you keep on hand. These are bark, sphagnum moss, perlite (with peat moss or coco-peat), and coconut fibre. Each has different characteristics and its own strengths and weaknesses. There are a range of other materials that are useful, such as styrene foam, pebbles, sand, etc) but I consider these fringe additives as opposed to major components and I am sure you can succeed without them.

The challenge in a mixed collection is that the plants are usually all jammed together. Watering often takes place for all at the same time regardless of the needs of some plants for different moisture requirements and different drying times. Some differences can be accommodated through choice of microclimates in your growing area. eg hanging plants higher, placing them in the bright end versus the shady end, or nearer the fan etc, but beyond that, adjusting the potting medium gives us a mechanism that can have a multiplier effect on microclimate differences.

1 – Bark - Bark is readily available, relatively cheap, and comes conveniently graded by the size of the bark pieces. One brand calls the bark fine, medium, or coarse, another by approximate particle size in millimetres. There are also more specialised mixes such as Miscellaneous Mix (a combination of sizes and components perfect for natives) and Cymbidium Mix (in its various brands and forms) . Some of the bark quality isn't what it was 20 years ago but it is still a very useful medium. I use medium and coarse barks for Laelias, Cattleyas, Vandaceous, and other coarse rooted, dryer growers, and a blended mix of sizes and components for more general miscellaneous orchids.

medium bark (coins are 5,10,20cents)



With bark, the pH in the pot can be a serious factor. It will usually start out around pH6, which is good for most orchids, but can eventually sink down to as low 3.5 to 4. The pH getting lower and lower is associated with the decay of the bark as it composts in the pot and is often exacerbated by watering too heavily. In overly wet conditions the bark can tend to go off fairly quickly, staying wetter and wetter after each watering, and the orchid may need repotting after as little as 1 or 2 years. However, judicious use of a little garden lime or dolomite, sprinkled over the top of the mix once a year, can extend the life of bark in the pot, and aid in balancing the pH. Just make sure you don't overdo it. A teaspoon of garden lime/dolomite sprinkled onto a 15cm pot is all you need.

When you use bark, make sure you feed the plants regularly and watch the wetness of the pot. If they look too wet they probably are, so either try to water less often or place the plants where they will dry out more quickly.

2 - Sphagnum Moss - Sphagnum Moss is an amazing medium. It has terrific remedial properties for sick plants and there is nothing better for striking backbulbs and divisions. It can be obtained as live moss, or in dried compressed blocks, and both work well. The dried product keeps well and the amount you need can be rehydrated as needed. Every grower should have at least a small supply available. Even for healthy plants it is a very good medium in its own right but like all media, it has its drawbacks. It is expensive and it is getting harder and harder to obtain good quality moss. Good moss lasts about 12 months in the pot but less if it gets regular fertilizer. Once the sphagnum moss has "gone off", you need to get the plant out of it quickly because all of its positive qualities are reversed and roots quickly die.



AAA New Zealand Sphagnum Moss

3 – Peat and Perlite ("P&P") - Perlite is an expanded volcanic glass that is completely inert & pH neutral. The perlite most growers use comes from Chillagoe in Queensland and comes graded in particle sizes called "coarse", "super coarse", and "jumbo", where jumbo is the largest (particles up to at about pea size). Perlite on its own doesn't provide any organic interchange buffer for fertilizer and once it starts to dry out, perlite by itself goes from moist to dry very quickly. It is usually used in combination with medium Lithuanian peat moss, to provide the organic ion interchange. The basic formula most people use is 1 part peat to about 5 or 6 parts jumbo perlite. I have experimented with ratios of 12, 16, and then 20:1 but I concluded that it doesn't work properly with less and less peat.



different grades of peat

P & P mixes are very stable. The perlite is inert and the peat has already reached a point of almost nil decay over thousands of years in the ground. The combination has a slightly acid pH around 6.0 (perfect for most orchids) and lasts virtually forever. However, you still need to repot relatively regularly because plants outgrow pots and because dead roots eventually accumulate in the pot and need to be cleaned out.



Be Aware – peat and perlite mixes are generally wetter than fresh bark mixes. Some growers have tried it and rejected it because it works differently to other media and growers can have a problem if they use a wide range of media for different orchids and water everything together. Reduce your overall watering for best results. Varying the P : P ratio, choosing the grade of perlite you use, adding styrene foam, and/or mixing perlite grades together, can also give you some control over how quickly the mix dries. I use P&P mainly for Pleurothallids, Dendrochilums, some Dendrobiums, and a few others.

4 - Coconut Fibre

- Although commercial nurseries here and overseas have been using it for quite a few years, coconut fibre is a relatively new medium to most of us. It obviously has great potential. As a medium it is long lasting, slow to bio-degrade, and depending on the brand and the washing process, has a pH of about 6.0 – 6.5. The material comprises two natural materials which form the husk of the coconut. A coarse, stiff, woody, thread like material we call coir, which is the same fibre used to make coir doormats etc, and a peat like material that fills the spaces between the coir fibres. Sort of like an insulator and moisture absorber.



The commercial orchid potting material, is basically the chopped up fibrous husk off coconuts, a byproduct of the copra production plantations in India and Sri Lanka among other places. It comes in dried, compressed blocks of more or less cubed chunks, pre-cut into specific sizes to different grades of fineness. There are various brands available - one used to be available from Bunnings hardware stores but I am not sure that source is still available. I believe that Ray Clement's 'Tinonee Orchids' still markets another type.

The material needs to be soaked and rinsed before you use it. Stories are told that some supplies are contaminated with sea salt from the discarded coconut husks being stored too close to the ocean before they are processed and compressed for horticultural use. I don't know if this is true, but I heed the need to wash and rinse.

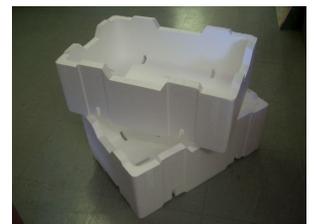
To prepare the material for use, I soak a **half a dried compressed block** in a garbage bin for 3 or 4 days to let it stew, then tip it out into foam boxes fitted with a couple of layers of shade cloth in the bottom. A half a block fills 2 foam boxes after soaking. I then give the boxes a thorough rinse with a hose to wash out any salts released by the soak. Be careful when you rinse it however. All these coconut fibre products include a significant proportion of the fine peaty material and you need to retain a decent proportion of these fines as an integral part of the mix. If you remove too much of the fines by washing or sieving, the mix dries faster than is practical for most orchids and doesn't retain sufficient water. A dry mix can be a useful trick for one or two oddball orchids, but it isn't suitable for most.

As with bark and perlite mediums, you can adjust the moisture content of your coconut fibre potting medium by choosing the coarse or fine grades, reducing the peaty component, or by adding other components like styrene foam. I experimented with various mixes of fine, medium, and coarse coco-fibre, added perlite, and added styrene foam. I was very impressed with results in the first 6 months or so but after that I began to experience rots killing off some plants and others just suddenly stopping their forward progress. I am not sure why, but I think part of the problem was that the finer, peaty materials may have wash out from between the coir strands and accumulated in the bottom of the pot, creating a bog zone, which would have resulted in root decline.

At present, I have cut back my use of coco-fibre to using it as an additive to some of my specialist mixes to purposely retain a little more moisture – such as for Paphs. However, I know that many nurseries and other growers are still getting excellent results in coco-fibre dominant mixes so the problem may just be the way in which I was using it.

Fringe Materials - As I mentioned earlier, there are dozens of side components that experienced growers use as additives or even as major components. For example: shellgrit, charcoal, fly-ash, pebbles or stones, wine corks, crumbled cork. Over the years, I have tried just about all of them as each wave of "new discovery" swept the orchid grower world. I probably still have half bags of some of the stuff stashed away in the shed somewhere.

Many are useful, and have their place, but none are the new magic potting material that they were once thought to be. However, there is one 'side material' I do use in nearly every blend, and that is crumbled styrene foam. I use it in quantities from 10% to 25% in nearly every combination and I am convinced it provides a substantial positive benefit - mainly in improving drainage and air content in the pot.



However, before you rush off to smash up one of those white foam boxes you carry your plants in, or to buy a bag of bean bag balls, let me stress that there are many types of styrene foam. The boxes we all use are very dense, strong foam and unsuitable for this purpose, nor do I like bean bag balls. Their perfect roundness makes them too hard to blend with other components and they seem to have a hardened surface that repels water.

The foam I use is the softer more easily crumbled type that is often used as packing material in glassware, or electrical equipment. However, even this more easily crumbled type of foam can vary a lot. I search out the types made from 'larger' rather than 'finer' bubbles of styrene, and that can be fairly easily broken up by hand, or shredded on something like a cheese grater etc.



Sheets of soft, coarse foam

Electrostatic attraction is somewhat of a problem when handling styrene foam, or when smashing up blocks or sheets of styrene, but this can be managed reasonably if you do it directly into a tub of whatever bark or potting mix you are adding it to. The mix needs to be moist and you need to keep mixing the foam into the moist mix as you shred or crumble the styrene. Just take your time.