

About Tom Mirenda

Tom Mirenda has been cultivating plants since his early childhood and lives to create beauty with plants in botanic garden settings for more than half of his adult life. Originally trained as a Marine Biologist, Tom moved to Hawaii in his early 20s to pursue a MB career and worked on the trophic relationships of denizens of coral reefs in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands (Midway and French Frigate Shoals). There he realized he was better suited to horticultural pursuits and took positions at New York Botanical Garden, Brooklyn Botanical Garden and at the incredible Greentree Estate in Long Island where he cared for a first-class orchid collection. During this time, Tom also was the floor manager of the legendary New York International Orchid Show. Eventually Tom accepted the Orchid Collection Specialist Position at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, where he cultivated and curated a huge diverse orchid collection for the past 17 years. The collection was used to create massive 4 to 5 month long educational orchid exhibits displayed to literally millions of visitors each year.

For the past 14 years Tom has contributed 2 monthly columns for the ORCHIDS magazine and the Bulletin of the American Orchid Society, and has developed an international following as a writer, speaker, and advocate for orchid conservation around the world. Last year Tom co-authored The Book of Orchids with two scientists from Kew and has done speaking tours in the British isles for the last three summers. He has also presented at the last 3 World Orchid Conferences and several IOCC and AOCs on Conservation topics. Tom was a founding member of the North American Orchid Conservation Center and continues his support of orchids conservation there and around the world.

Last fall, Tom took a major gamble and left the security of his job with the Smithsonian to take a leadership position at the Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden, an exceptionally beautiful jewel on the lush Hamakua coast just north of Hilo on the Big Island (aka the Orchid Island!). What Tom found there was an Orchid Paradise where myriad spectacular orchids of all types, both lowland and montane species and hybrids seem to thrive, simply planted in the trees, placing them thoughtfully in the landscape. Ultimately, he believes that the concept of growing orchids in garden settings to be a viable model world-wide for orchid conservation and encourages the *ex-situ* cultivation of orchids by diverse stakeholders in the orchid community. He also believes that it is only with the cooperation of botanical garden professionals, commercial growers, academic and committed orchid collectors, and backyard growers that orchids will survive the vicissitudes of climate change..