

MARIBYRNONG ORCHID SOCIETY INC.

GUIDELINES FOR THE CULTIVATION OF CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS

Many people ask, "Why doesn't my orchid flower?" There can be no definite answer to this question, but the reason usually boils down to one of the following factors.

1. LIGHT INTENSITY

Light is generally considered THE most critical factor in getting Cymbidiums to flower. They must be given as much light as possible without getting sunburnt. The following table can be used as a guide:

April - August	full sunlight
September-October	30% shade
November - March.....	50% shade

These conditions can be approximated by placing the plants OFF THE GROUND on the south side of a deciduous tree, but the ideal way to grow them is under a frame of timber or pipe which is covered by shade cloth. The variation of light intensities to those above would probably be ideal, but many of our top growers are obtaining excellent results growing the plants under 50% shade cloth all year round, with some form of solid, transparent material to protect the flowers in spring. Cymbidiums ARE NOT houseplants.

2. AIR MOVEMENT

Air movement is essential at all times, although probably not as critical as light for flowering, it is essential for the health of the plants. An enclosed stuffy atmosphere is a sure way of inviting fungal problems and numerous pests. Cymbidiums should NOT be grown in a glasshouse unless you are prone to many heavy frosts, and then only if it is left open at all times and the plants get plenty of fresh moving air. A small electric fan can help in this regard.

3. POTTING MEDIUM AND REPOTTING

The mix must be open and well drained, it must allow the plant to stay moist, but never soggy or wet. It must also allow the establishment of a good root system and support the plant. There are a few good suppliers of Orchid Bark and usually it can be obtained from our Orchid Society Shows.

It is generally accepted that black plastic pots are best nowadays, but ensure that you choose a pot that has good drainage and make sure all the drainage holes are clear. Cymbidiums don't like to be over-potted so the pot should be just large enough for the roots (After the old mix and dead roots have been discarded) to fit comfortably. Plants should never be divided into pieces smaller than 3 or 4 green bulbs. NEVER USE SOIL IN YOUR MIXES.

4. WATERING

The plants should be kept moist at all times but never allowed to become wet and soggy - especially in cold weather. Potting mixes that are used in warmer climates will not be suitable for our cold Melbourne climate because they hold too much water. With a well drained mix, as suggested above, watering can be carried out every day in the warmer months and reduced to once every 10 days or so in the cooler months.

Watering will depend entirely on your mix, climatic conditions, pot size and type and a great number of variable factors. For this reason you must check your plants individually to decide if they need watering. Remember, just damp, NOT soggy.

5. FLOWERING

Cymbidiums will rarely flower off a plant that has less than 3 or 4 mature green bulbs. If you have a plant around this size, all you can do is provide the correct conditions and wait. Although Cymbidiums ARE NOT HOUSEPLANTS, they can be brought inside for a week or so whilst in flower. The flower spike should only be left on the plant for about 10 days after the last flower has opened or it will take too much out of the plant and next year's flowering will suffer. The flowers will last just as long in a vase inside as they would on the plant. Cymbidiums mainly flower from about July to October, but many more are being bred to supply you with flowering plants all year round.

6. FERTILISERS

It is common practice, these days, to add a slow release fertiliser around the top of the pot when repotting, eg. 8-9 month Osmocote® added at the rate of a level teaspoon to a 6" pot. A similar quantity of Dolomite lime is also said to be beneficial by some growers. The slow release fertilizer can be replaced or supplemented by the use of liquid fertilisers at no more than 1/2 the recommended strength. The usual rule with fertilisers is little and often. Don't use fertilisers high in nitrogen (N) after the end of December as this will inhibit flowering.

7. PROBLEMS

If your plant is sick, or unhealthy to such an extent that the roots are in poor condition, the plant will rarely flower. If all the bulbs are shrivelled and appear empty, it is a sure indication that something is wrong with the roots. Carefully tap the plant out of the pot and have a look at the roots, they should be white and fleshy, not brown or black, nor should they be shriveled or rotten. If you find that your roots are in poor condition, remove all the dead roots and shriveled back bulbs and repot the plant paying particular attention to the guidelines set out previously particularly in relation to pot size. If your roots are in such poor condition you had better have a look at your mixture or culture at the same time, because you are doing something wrong. Plants that are infected with virus will often refuse to flower. Virus shows up as irregular markings running along the leaves. These marks are a light colour on new leaves and turn black with age. If you suspect virus, separate that plant from the rest of your collection and ask someone who knows. If your plant does have virus, there is no cure. You must burn the plant to stop the spread of this disease to the rest of your collection. You will not be permitted to bring virus plants along to Orchid Societies meetings or shows. A word of warning, the most common way of spreading virus through a plant is with cutting implements during repotting, so it is essential to sterilise all cutting implements thoroughly between each plant. The most simple method of sterilising is to run the instrument through a flame. Various pests and diseases, slugs and snails, scale, red spider mite and mealy bug. These can all be controlled by spraying with some of the numerous pesticides and fungicides on the market, **USING EXTREME CARE. READ THE LABEL AND COMPLY WITH THE SAFETY DIRECTIONS, THEY MEAN WHAT THEY SAY**