

LOOKING AFTER YOUR CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS

Easy to Grow

The Cymbidium, which is only one of many different orchid genera, is a temperate climate orchid which grows very well under Perth's climatic conditions, provided it is given some protection from the hot summer and some fertiliser. They are tough, hardy plants despite the delicate appearance of their flowers.

Shadecloth

It is not essential, but ideally Cymbidiums should be grown under shadecloth – 70% away from the coast or 50% closer to the coast. They will flower better if provided with as much uninterrupted, filtered sunshine as is possible. Many of our customers successfully grow Cymbidiums under trees that cast a dappled shade. Excessive shade reduces flowering.

Cymbidiums thrive in a humid sheltered location – a shade house is ideal.

Potting Mix

Cymbidium orchids grow best in a coarse, open, free draining potting medium. Being semi-terrestrial plants they should not be planted in the ground. We recommend our own potting mix which is coarse, graded pine bark, to which is added blood and bone at the rate of 10 litres per cubic metre and gypsum at the rate of 5 litres per cubic metre. This mix should be thoroughly damp before use. Blood and bone will cause the growth of a fungus which appears like cotton wool in the mix, this should be ignored as it is harmless to the orchid.

Fertilising

These orchids require regular, minute amounts of balanced fertiliser. Fortnightly dilute liquid fertilising is the best method, but time consuming. We therefore recommend the use of our own slow release mix which should be applied in February and September, at the rate of one teaspoon per 175mm pot. Over fertilising, especially with nitrogen, will lead to excessive leaf growth at the expense of flower spikes.

Flowering

Cymbidium orchids flower between April and October. The same plant flowers at the same time each year. An orchid plant can be in flower for up to 2 or 3 months. The flower spikes, whether left on the plant or cut and placed in a vase, are usually long lasting. Orchids are not indoor plants, however, while in flower they are easily maintained inside provided the potting mix is kept moist. To ensure adequate watering while inside, the pot should be soaked in a bucket of water for ten minutes, once a week. The hotter and drier the inside conditions, the shorter the life of the flower spike will be. After flowering the plants should be placed outside.

Splitting

Cymbidium orchids will flower better if grown into large plants rather than being regularly split into smaller plants. Orchids are not adversely affected by being 'root bound' or tight in the pot. An orchid grown well and constrained for too long will usually split the plastic pot. Very large plants may be removed from the pot and split (using a knife), into several plants, ensuring that each 'piece' comprises at least 3 or 4 green pseudo-bulbs and preferably 1 or 2 backbulbs. Backbulbs are those old pseudo-bulbs that have dropped all of their leaves. Any excess backbulbs can be stripped of roots and planted (half buried in potting mix) separately. From shooting new growth, a backbulb will take 2 or 3 years to grow into a plant large enough to flower.

Growth/Flower Habit

Flower spikes arise from mature or maturing green pseudo-bulbs, which usually only flower once. The more new shoots a plant develops, the better it's flowering potential for the following year. Therefore, ensure that your plants are growing new leads. After several years, the pseudo-bulb will slowly lose all of its leaves which turn yellow and fall off. A leafless pseudo bulb is called a backbulb. The backbulbs on a growing plant can be tidied up by removing the dead leaf husks.

Propagation/Flasks

Mericlone is the term given to a plant that has been generated through plant tissue culture. The flower of a mericlone should be identical to that of the parent plant. A seedling is produced from the cross fertilising of two flowering plants – the flowers of the offspring can be very varied. From cross pollination to the flowering of the offspring will take some 5 to 8 years. Today, Cymbidiums start their young lives growing in sterile containers called flasks, which contain a nutrient agar medium. Plants will grow in the flask for 8 to 18 months before being potted out into the normal growing environment. It will take these plants 3 to 4 years to reach flowering size.



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