

# ORCHIDS

## HOW TO GROW EXOTIC CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS TO PERFECTION

The Cymbidium orchid, which is only one of hundreds of different orchid species, is a plant that is well suited to temperate climates. It can be grown very well in many areas of Western Australia, but it does need protection from the hot summer sun, an abundant supply of moisture through summer and regular feeding

Because cymbidiums flower for so long inside the home, many people use them instead of buying cut flowers. It can certainly be a cheaper alternative, so don't feel guilty if you choose to discard your orchid after flowering

The delicate appearance of the flowers belies the toughness of the plant. Shade is an essential ingredient in growing Cymbidiums successfully, however, it is important that they are not too heavily shaded. 50% cloth is ideal, many growers can successfully flower Cymbidiums under trees that cast a dappled shade, for example most Eucalyptus and Avocado trees. If the plant is too heavily shaded it may grow very successfully but will produce very few flower spikes.

Cymbidium orchid plants need to have spectacularly free draining soil. Ordinary potting mixes are not free draining enough for most varieties. Cymbidiums certainly should not be grown in garden beds as they need a potting mix that is very open to allow good air circulation as well as instantaneous drainage. You can make up your own home brew of potting mix by combining one part of jarrah wood chips and one part of graded pine park chips. Just dust this combination with blood and bone. The mix should be thoroughly damp before use. Alternatively you can pick up specific orchid potting mixes at your local Waldecks Garden Centre.

### FEEDING

Orchids require regular feeding throughout the year. One way of meeting their needs is to water them with a diluted liquid fertiliser every fortnight. An easier solution is to use Osmocote Slow Release fertiliser or Apex Grow. This should be applied January, April, July and October at the rate of 1 teaspoon for a 175mm pot.

### FLOWERING

Orchids can flower for up to two or three months and they make magnificent cut blooms. As a cut flower they are unusually long lasting. While you might see orchid plants brought in the house while flowering, they are not successful indoor plants and should only be kept inside for a few weeks at a time. If the plant is subjected to hot dry air as a result of being near a heater or radiator it will considerably shorten the life of the flowers.

### RE-POTTED

The best time to split up or re-pot Cymbidium orchids is at the end of the flowering season. Cymbidiums tend to flower more successfully when they are slightly root bound and this doesn't adversely affect the plant. There is no need to worry if the pot is getting fairly full of bulbs. However, if the plant begins to split a plastic pot then you know its time to break it up. Large plants can be removed from a pot and split into several plants. It is important that each piece you break off has at least three or four green pseudo-bulbs at the base and in addition, one or two back bulbs. Back bulbs are older pseudo-bulbs which have dropped all their leaves. The modern practice is to pull the plants apart rather than cut them up with a knife or tomahawk. The reason for this is that any cutting instrument that contacts the sap is capable of transmitting viral disease to other plants. It is a good idea to dust any injured or broken plant tissue with sulphur to further reduce disease problems.

Back bulbs can be removed and potted individually and they are capable of producing brand new plants. These often take three or five years to reach flowering size. Cymbidiums don't have to be split, however, the larger the plant the more spikes it is capable of producing. Flower spikes arise from mature or maturing leads or shoots (pseudo bulbs with green leaves). Keep your eye out for snails, they love them. Therefore it is important to promote the growth of these new shoots to ensure the best possible flowering.

The flowering season for Cymbidiums goes from May through to November. Support emerging flower spikes with bamboo canes for stability.

## **PESTS**

Orchids don't have very many pests. Scale, aphids, slugs and snails are the worst and can be controlled by regular spraying with White oil and Pyrethrum and by the use of snail bait.

## **DISEASES**

A virus known as Cymbidium Mosaic Virus is common amongst hobbyist growers. When purchasing a plant deal only with reputable nurseries. The best way to deal with a virused plant is to destroy it, unless there is a very good reason for retaining it as the disease is incurable.

## **TIPS**

1. Don't take your plant inside where the atmosphere is hot and dry due to artificial heating. Your Cymbidium will drop its flower buds and ultimately drop its leaves in this warm dry atmosphere.
2. Don't leave flower spikes on the plant until the flowers die. This can result in non flowering the following season. Approximately four weeks after the last flower is fully open, the spike should be removed so that the plant has a full growing cycle for next year's flowering.
3. If your plant fails to flower give it the recommended attention plus exposure to a sunnier situation to help force flower spikes.

Cymbidium orchid collecting can become habit forming. These glorious blooms can really get you in and buying just one of them could result in a lifetime addiction. So you have been warned.