

BACK TO BASICS

CYMBIDIUM CULTURE-----SUMMERTIME.

(Cymbidium- is a genus of about 44 species, from all over the world) they may be classed as -

Epiphytic - Growing on another host eg. tree limb eg. The Australian Cymbidium *suave.* & *canaliculatum*

Lithophytic - Growing on rocks eg. Cymbidium *devonianum* (also *epiphitic*)

Terrestrial - Growing in the ground-Cymbidium *goeringii* or *virens*, and C. *insigne*

Saprophytic - A plant which derives it's nourishment partly or totally from dead organic material.

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Cymbidiums have large pseudo bulbs, or storage organs for moisture and nutrients. They are covered by linear leaves (grow in covering layers) and produce thick white roots, which feed the pseudo bulb, nutrients can also be absorbed through the leaves. They reproduce by means of producing new shoots from the eyes of the pseudo bulbs, which continue to develop their own storage bulb, leaves and roots. They produce flowers from the side of the bulb, which grow to a large strong cane (spike) bearing numerous individual flowers. These spikes may be upright, arching or pendulous (hanging down).

Summer Culture

These orchids require good air movement & plenty of sunlight, preferably during the early morning with some shade over the hottest part of the day. (shade cloth is used by many growers either 50 or 75% shade grade. If you can provide a well drained medium to grow them in eg. bark, they can tolerate daily watering, especially when it's windy, although most growers water every 2nd or third day. Take note of the leaves and bulbs, if you notice that the pseudo bulbs are beginning to wither, check the root system, and check that they are firm and not soft and mushie, if the roots are ok, then more watering is advisable. If the leaves are dark green and lanky, then more light is required, the best is for mid green and strong. Try and water early in the morning, as they like to be dried off by nightfall, this also lessens the likelihood of water laying in the leaves during the hottest part of the day, and causing bulb rot, pathogens thrive in warm water and do not take long to cause the eventual demise of the whole plant once established. Some growers recommend a dose of anti-fungal agent once or twice a year.

Autumn Culture

There are two main times with growing and flowering Cymbidiums. During late summer and Autumn, the spikes will be visible. This important time ensures that you have a well displayed spike or not. When a spike emerges from the bulb, insert a stake as close to it as possible and train the spike. It is especially important with red varieties as they tend to send up the spike lower and more likely to become trapped in the side of the pot. A piece of old Venetian blind plastic inserted just under the spike will encourage the spike to climb up. There are three types of spikes, Pendulous (which will hang down), Arching (will grow upwards and then arch down from the first flower) and upright, these spikes need to be well staked to achieve the effect. Always when working with spikes, do so once the morning has warmed up as they are very brittle when cold. Continue to water as needed.

Fertilising is an important part of orchid culture. You will hear all sorts of fertilising regimes and what is best for them is not necessarily right for your plants. They require Nitrogen, Phosphorus and potassium, N.P.K.. Most commercially packaged fertilisers are more than adequate, as they contain all these elements plus many more eg. iron (Fe.) The recommended quantity should be halved. Some growers give Higher Nitrogen during the growing season and then change to higher Potassium (K) during the flowering season. Some use higher Potassium all year round. Don't over fertilise as you cymbidiums can only store so much, after that it's money down the drain. Some believe that black tips on the end of the leaves, indicate over fertilising. Sunlight is also a most important part of orchid culture, and is used by the plants leaves for the process of photosynthesis, the plants producing it's own nutrients.

Back Bulbs are a natural part of your cymbidiums growth, they are bulbs which have no leaves. They still can supply the plant with nutrients, although, there is no reason to leave more than one or two on each plant. They eventually die off and become soft and the roots die, causing unwanted soft and decaying areas in the mix. When repotting, it is preferable to do so before the new growth and flower spikes begin to emerge, spring time and if necessary, Autumn. Always position the plant in the pot with the oldest or back bulb to one side of the pot, as the new growths will emerge from the green bulb and progress on across the pot. Most growers like to have enough room in the new pot for about two years growth.

Spikes, stake the spike as early as possible, and make sure that the stakes are clean and free from old mix. Most flower spikes should be staked up to the bottom of the first flower. Some growers attach elastic on a peg to encourage the spike to stay straight and to lengthen, preventing flowers from bunching up on the stem. Any staking, tying or manipulating of the spike, should be done later in the day, when the spike is warmer and more easily handled. Most white, yellow, green and pale colours should be shaded once the buds are free of the sheath failure to do this will result in a stripe effect through the petals and sepals. A small fold of newspaper or brown paper bag can be used for the shading. Do not cover the whole plant as the leaves still need light. Red, Browns and darker shades on the other hand require full light to intensify the colour.

R.M.