

# ORCHID CLUB OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

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Established 1939

## CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS

*Cymbidiums* need sunlight, fresh air, water, fertilizer and well-drained potting mix to produce the best results.

Your plants will flourish if these simple requirements are given in the correct proportions.

### SUNLIGHT:

*Cymbidiums* require plenty of sunlight or they will not produce flowers. They appreciate the full morning sun, but require some shade during the heat of the day. If grown in a shade house, a covering of 50-70% shade-cloth is recommended. If a shade house is not available, stand the pots on a couple of bricks under a deciduous tree which provides filtered sunlight. During summer, the leaves should be yellowish/green, not dark green, which is an indication of too much shade.

### WATER:

Never allow the plant to completely dry out. When the potting mix is dry at a depth of 3cm, in a medium-sized pot, watering is required. However, it is important that the plant is not continually sodden. One heavy watering is more beneficial than several light applications. Humidity is important and can be created by spreading moisture-holding material such as fine pine bark or sawdust on the ground. This material can be dampened down each morning during the hot summer months.

Plants should be placed near the ground. If benches are used, make sure they are not too high.

### POTTING MIX:

There are many different potting mixes in use as *Cymbidiums* grow well in a wide variety of potting media. The main requirement is a mixture which is open and well drained, does not break down too quickly and hold moisture without becoming sodden. Common ingredients are peat moss, sand, rice hulls, wood chips, pine bark and isolite. There are several good potting mixes available on the market in Adelaide.

### FERTILIZER:

The use of a good quality fertilizer, organic or chemical, is beneficial especially during spring and summer when the plants are growing vigorously. Fertilizers should be used at half strength and applied twice as often. Always water a plant well before applying fertilizer. Too much fertilizer of the wrong type can be detrimental and in some cases, may even reduce the flowering potential of the plant.

## PESTS:

Well-grown orchids are not particularly susceptible to disease, but it is common sense to guard against the usual plant pests and diseases.

Never use pesticide sprays on or near flower buds. Contact with some chemicals can cause severe spotting and distortion of the blooms.

Plants should be guarded against caterpillars and use snail and slug pellets when necessary.

## FLOWERING:

It has been found that *Cymbidiums* need a drop in night temperatures to initiate flower spikes during the warm months of December to February. The best way to achieve this drop is to give the plants a short overhead drenching after sundown.

*Cymbidiums* will grow well and flower freely under the conditions outlined above. However, only experience will teach the grower the best cultural methods and ideal locations for plants. With a little care and commonsense you will be repaid with a profusion of attractive long-lasting flowers.

Although *Cymbidium* orchids are as easy to grow as the very hardest pot plants, beginners sometimes have a little trouble with them – generally through trying to be too careful.

Some of the questions most often asked, together with their answers are:-

### DO I NEED A GLASSHOUSE TO GROW CYMBIDIUMS?

Definitely not, a glass house is too hot during summer. *Cymbidiums* love outside conditions with plenty of sun, water and air movement. They are ideally suited in a lightly shaded position where they get at least two-thirds full sun for all of the day, especially during summer. The ideal, is a shade house made from 50% to 70% shade cloth, but a lightly leafed tree, such as an old almond tree, will give very good conditions. They will not grow continuously in a sunroom or an enclosed verandah, as it is too dark, too dry and too hot during summer. They can be taken into a sunroom whilst they are in flower to protect the blooms.

### WHY WON'T MY CYMBIDIUM FLOWER?

You have most likely been growing it in too shady a position. *Cymbidiums* are sun-lovers. Shift it to a position as described above. Heavy applications of fertilizer can often result in excessive leaf growth and reduced flower production.

### CAN CYMBIDIUMS BE GROWN IN THE GROUND?

Yes, but not very satisfactorily. They require an open, light potting medium. If you want to grow them in a garden bed, you would have to prepare the top 20cm with orchid potting medium before planting. *Cymbidiums* must have good drainage.

### WHY ARE PLASTIC POTS USED?

For a number of reasons:-

- (a) plastic pots are light to handle.
- (b) they retain moisture longer than terra-cotta ones and thus require less watering.
- (c) they do not cause salt build up in the potting mix.
- (d) they keep cleaner and look better.
- (e) they keep compost warmer and thus length the growing season.

### **WHAT CAUSES BROWN LEAF TIPS ON *CYMBIDIUM* LEAVES?**

Leaf tip die back is thought to be caused by salt build up in the tips of older leaves. If the die back is not excessive and leaves are dropping off the plant prematurely, then you may have the plants or conditions too dry. Check the compost to see if the root system of the plant is in good condition. Re-pot if necessary. Very hard water often causes leaf tip die back. Always water heavily so that salt deposits are washed away.

### **WHAT DO I DO WHEN *CYMBIDIUM* BULBS GO SOFT AND ROTTEN?**

Several different types of rot can attack cymbidiums. Always remove the infected parts of the plant. In the case of a back bulb going soft, remove the bulb and re pot the green growth into fresh potting mix. A soft back bulb will quickly infect its green shoot if left attached. On mature *Cymbidiums*, a black rot will sometimes appear on the outside of the bulbs.

Treatment with a recognized fungicide will generally control this problem. Brown rhizome rot is an insidious enemy as a plant can be lost before the infection is noticed. Remove infected parts of the plant immediately and spray the clean sections with fungicide. Pot the clean part of the plant into fresh potting mix.

### **DOES DIVIDING A PLANT STOP IT FROM FLOWRING NEXT SEASON?**

As long as several flowering size divisions are kept and the dividing is done, preferably before November, then given correct growing conditions, these divisions should flower the following season.

### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR A BACK BULB TO FLOWER?**

As a general rule, back bulbs take 3-4 years to develop into flowering size plants.

### **DOES A PLANT HAVE TO FILL A POT BEFORE IT FLOWERS?**

No. Some older varieties were difficult to flower, but present day *Cymbidiums* flower more freely, even on small divisions.

### **CAN I PLANT A SMALL PLANT INTO A BIG POT TO SAVE TIME?**

It is unwise to over pot. Pot your division into a container with enough room for about two year's growth. Over potted orchids do not grow as well as those correctly potted. Over potting also wastes potting mix.