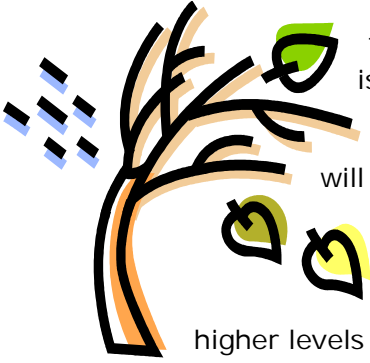


Cultural Notes – Autumn



There can be no doubt now that Summer is well and truly over. There is now little likelihood of leaf burn so we can now remove any extra shading we applied during the hottest months, or we can reposition plants to let them get more light. Many plants will be preparing for their main flowering period and some will have already started. Ensure the growing conditions are focussed on flower production and not just plant growth. In particular, lessen waterings and use fertiliser with lower levels of nitrogen, or proportionally higher levels of phosphorus and potassium.

The flowers that appear in the coming months make this a most rewarding time but it is also a busy time. As soon as the flower spikes appear consider what sort of support or staking the plant needs and later what is needed just to make the inflorescence show at its best. Be very careful about two things. Avoid water lodging in places where it can damage or rot emerging buds and open flowers. Because flowers will try to open towards the brightest source of light don't move them unnecessarily. If you do have to move the plant to stake it, put it back in the same orientation.

The other continuing job is repotting. Immediately **after** the flowering is over and before new growths become too large **consider** repotting. I say **consider** because you may not have to do so. You do not want the roots sitting in broken down mix and rotting during the winter months, but if the mix is still fresh consider whether the plant is outgrowing the pot.

There will still be some risk from aphids, mealy bugs and fungus. Check for aphids on developing blossoms and whether your plants need some **Confidor** (for aphids), **Two-in-One** [Killyptus & Pyrethrum] (or *metho*, for mealy bugs) and **Mancozeb** or **Fongarid** (for fungus).

Cattleyas (and their hybrids with *Brassavolas*, *Laelias* and *Sophronitis*) Many of these will have started their Autumn flowering.

Water twice weekly and use weak, low nitrogen fertiliser. Make sure that water does not sit for long in developing flower spikes, & try to avoid spraying chemicals on the flowers and buds. Repot after the flowering if your plant is starting to "climb out" of the pot. Cattleyas "enjoy" repotting. Consider dividing the plant and potting the back bulbs.

Dendrobiums (Hard cane types, Australian natives & their hybrids, including Intermediate types.)

These are used to a hot, wet, monsoon type summer with a winter drought. They come from open woodlands so need high light levels. Water twice weekly and use weak balanced fertiliser. These plants usually start new growths well before the flowering and certainly before the flowering is over. If these plants have already flowered, you can start them on their winter drought regime BUT do not kill any small new shoots.

Fortunately these plants do not mind being pot-bound. If you **do have to** get a larger pot for the stability of a big plant, either bury the original pot in it or make sure you tie the whole plant down firmly in the pot.

Dendrobiums (Soft cane types & their hybrids)

These are used to a hot, wet, monsoon type summer so it is impossible to overwater or overfeed them in the summer months. Now that Autumn is here they require completely different treatment.

STOP all feeding, and only water when necessary. Put them somewhere bright and dry for the next six months. They can be repotted now as they will not flower until Spring. Most are deciduous so do not worry about leaf loss. If they get water and feed now, all you will get is lots of kikis. [Kiki = adventitious growth (Hawaiian for baby)]

Oncidiums (As well as *Miltonias*, *Brassias* & their hybrids)

In Summer, the main requirements were not to let their leaves burn and to keep them moist. By now many of the *Brassia* hybrids will be flowering and the *Oncidiums* will be sending out new flower spikes. Fertilise with low nitrogen fertilisers for flower development rather than plant growth. After they have flowered, let them dry out a little and rest.

Repot if necessary, because you think the potting mix is likely to have broken down or because the plant has outgrown the pot. The *Oncidium* family usually send out two new growths from every pseudobulb and so can be broken up regularly. **Think \$\$\$** Excess plants could be sold at our next Easter show, when they are well established and sending out new flower spikes.

Vandas (and their related species and hybrids)

Most of these grow with bare, exposed roots and so need to have moist air around them. They *should* be watered every second day, and humidity levels can be kept up by extra, light mistings or by damping down the floor below them. They need high light levels so you can remove any extra shade that may have been added for Summer.

If you are lucky they will now be showing flower spikes. Give them high phosphorus fertiliser and pray. Watch out for the nasties such as aphids who love new growths. If everything goes well these are the most rewarding of all orchids.

Phalaenopsis

These orchids are like the *Vandas* in their growth habit, their big fleshy, exposed roots and their lack of pseudobulbs. They must not be left to dry out, nor should they be left with water in the crown of the plant. Treat them as indoor plants but make sure they have good light. If I may be excused a repetition and a contradiction, these are the most rewarding of all orchids

Paphiopedilum (The Asian 'Slipper Orchid')

These plants also lack pseudobulbs and so need regular watering, probably every third day. Again, water sitting in the crown of the plant can rot newly emerging flower bulbs.

My **Phragmipedium**, a South American 'slipper orchid', now is showing its 20th and 21st flowers, having started flowering in the last week of November. It grows in straight sphagnum moss, kept continually moist and sitting in a tray of water. The current plant will die off, and the two new plants will be allowed to grow in this same pot.

Ian McLaren 21 – 04 – 09

These notes have been used at our Cultural and New Grower's Meetings. They are from various sources and we thank the authors. All articles are supplied in good faith and the Bribie Island Orchid Society and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.