

Cultural Notes – Winter



Here in sub-tropical Queensland the winter months are usually a delight for everyone. Orchid growers get a special treat from the large range of species that are in flower at this time, and the abundance of shows to visit. When the flowering is over there will be all sorts of jobs to do, so it is a good idea to start some of them as soon as possible. But first while the main flowering period is on make sure growing conditions are aimed at getting the best flowers and support plants to show of the blooms at their best.

Keep a close eye on your plants with buds so as not to be caught by unexpected showers just as they open. If you have to move them under cover give them the same orientation to the main light source.

Do not wait till all your Cattleyas have flowered before thinking about repotting, or the ones that flowered first will have large, crisp, easily-broken new growths. Get your potting medium ready now and start dealing with the pots that need it as soon as you can. This will avoid a large and daunting job in Spring.

Although the worst pest months are gone, check for things that CHEW or you could lose the delicate and tasty new shoots and buds. **Two-in-One** [Killyptus & Pyrethrum] will get rid of most insects and also mealy bugs, which want to hide under leaves and in sheaths.)

Cattleyas (and their hybrids with *Brassavolas*, *Laelias* and *Sophronitis*) Many of these began flowering in Autumn, though some will not even start till Spring. They do not need as much water at this time and only 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.)

Most of these flowered in late summer and Autumn and are now in a resting period. They do not need much water or fertiliser until their new growths have started.

The cooler growing species (*kingianum*, *tetragonum*...and their hybrids) will be flowering now.

Dendrobiums (Soft cane types & their hybrids)

You should have **STOPPED** all feeding, and be only watering when necessary. They need somewhere bright and dry if they are to flower in Spring. Do not worry about leaf loss, but protect the new buds when they start to form.

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

These can produce spectacular flowers at this time so it is easy to overlook the fact that they are also making new shoots. Water well, ensure good air movement and use a balanced fertiliser. Some growers recommend alternating high and low Nitrogen mixes. Although these plants can burn in summer, high light levels in winter promote good flowering, especially in the Brassia hybrids.

Vandas (and their related species and hybrids)

These should be flowering now. Although the lower temperatures mean less evaporation, you must still keep water up to these plants as their exposed roots depend on **humidity**, and our air is much drier in winter.

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. Some growers use under-bench misting but, providing the air is not too cold evaporation from open trays should raise the humidity enough. The tender new shoots and bulbs are apparently very tasty to many insects. The large, usually arching sprays usually need staking *in a natural manner* to show the blooms to their best advantage.

Paphiopedilum (The Asian 'Slipper Orchid')

As these plants finish flowering remove the dead spike, and remove the old leaves as the parent plant dies. It should have one or two new younger plants which must be kept growing until they can be repotted in Spring. Unlike orchids with pseudobulbs that appreciate alternately wet and dry roots, Paphs should be kept in moist but not wet medium which is not allowed to dry out.

Phragmipediums (the South American '**Slippers**') need similar treatment.

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