

Soft Cane Dendrobium Orchid Growing



This species is easily one of the most familiar and popular orchids in cultivation. A native of mountainous regions, it is of natural occurrence in southern China, Taiwan, northern India, Thailand Laos and Vietnam, Himalayas, Burma, Japan and Korea. It is popular for its ease of culture, massed displays of long lasting, large, colorful flowers and the range of variations exhibited in flower colour and form. The species first flowered in England in 1837 and it quickly became much sort after. When conditions are unsuitable, plants flower poorly and produce an excess of aerial growths at the expense of flowers.

Den Dawn Maree

In their natural habitat, these epiphytes occur in deciduous forest areas in mountainous regions. Hence, during summer when the trees are in full-leaf the plants are in quite shaded conditions where as during the winter, when the leaves have dropped from the trees. The orchids receive limited shade from the bare branches during the day and several degrees of frost during the night. These orchids are very hardy and can withstand a range in temperature. Temperature-wise, their natural climate is similar to that in southern Queensland and areas south towards Sydney.

They have a number of characteristics which help to differentiate them from other Dendrobiums. They flower mainly in the spring, have flexible leaves that often drop off during the winter when the plants are dormant or resting, The pseudobulbs are more slender at their base than most other Dendrobiums. The flowers are carried in short racemes of a few flowers at each node up the pseudobulb.

GROWING SEASON

The growing season for soft-canes commences in spring, and at the end of the flowering season. Usually in September or October. An increase in watering and warmth during this period will hasten shoot development. but full watering should be withheld until new growth is around 10mm long with root formation evident at its base.

Throughout the growing season, which usually extends until late March or April plants should be watered and fertilised regularly. The choice of fertilisers is similar to that for phalaenathe-type Dendrobiums although it is recommended that a lower nitrogen fertiliser is more appropriate. At the end of the growing season, the apex of the growing cane ceases to develop more leaves and this is the signal to gradually decrease watering and completely withhold all fertiliser. The plant now enters the dormant period which lasts until the following spring. During the resting period, the inflorescences are initiated. It is important that no fertilisers be applied during this period as this usually promotes the development of aerial growths instead of flowers. It is also of equal importance that at this time as much light as possible be given to the development of inflorescences. I can't express enough that Softcanes need a lot of light.

Weather patterns have some considerable effect on flowering and cold weather, as the growths reach maturity before flowering, is a must.

In Australia, Softcanes are in flower in Townsville while ours here are only in bud. When ours are in flower, those in Melbourne are just in bud. You can see the range in area and temperature that they grow in.



REPOTTING

Repotting usually occurs during the spring. The plant may be back-cut at any time during the year, and the actual separation of portions of the plant occurs when new growths are around 10mm long and forming its own roots system.

POTTING MEDIUM

Queensland Orchid Council

A good potting medium for Softcanes is a conventional mix of fine grade bark (80%) and (20%) charcoal, although some growers use 50-50 mixture of cymbidium mix with charcoal to improve the drainage. Regardless of the medium used, the container should be as small as possible, providing space for no more than two season's growth.

Ossie Granger. Glasshouse Society

I used to use a cymbidium mix: Now I use a mixture of Perlite, German Peat, bark and charcoal. They need good drainage but never let them dry out.

Edmund McKane Nambour.

My mix comprises of 2 parts Debco bark, 1/2 part coarse sand, 1/2 part peanut shell, and 1/4 part peat moss. You mix it together until it looks right.



The Orchid Club of South Australia.

Without any doubt, loosely potted live sphagnum moss has proved to be a most successful medium. We are obtaining encouraging results when using 50% chopped sphagnum moss plus 50% local pine bark, which passes through a 1/4 inch sieve.

Sandy Anderson. Bananacoast Orchids.

We grow our single flowering cane plants in 100mm (4") pots and a mix of 2/~ casunna bark, (1/4 to 1/2 inch grade) and 1/3 perlite and water well in the afternoon daily during summer.

PESTS

These Orchids are subject to attack by pests that growers know only too well and are treated with Insecticides appropriate to the pest.

Brown scale and mealy bug love to have a feed of Softcanes. Use a spray that will control these pests that you have found to be the most effective elsewhere in your orchid house. Dry scale will also establish itself on leaves if there is not a good housekeeping program.

DISEASES

Leaf spotting is about the only problem you get with Softcanes, this is caused by a fungus and can be controlled completely by using Dithane 45 or Daconil 2787. Should pseudobulbs shrivel it is not from a disease problem, generally it is caused from poor cultural conditions.

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.