

## GROWING CYMBIDIUM ORCHIDS the SPRINGFIELD ORCHIDS WAY

Contrary to popular belief, most cymbidiums are very easy to grow and flower and are as tough as old boots. They come in varying sizes, the blooms will last up to 3 months and some are exquisitely perfumed. Cymbidiums range in colour from white, green, yellow, orange, pink, red, purple, brown and virtually every shade in-between. With selective purchasing, it is possible for a grower with only 5 or 6 plants to enjoy flowers continuously for almost 12 months of the year.

### GROWING REQUIREMENTS

The main reason that growers have trouble flowering their plants is because they give them too much shade. Cymbidiums grow and flower best if they are provided with **bright** and **sunny** conditions - the **most important factors in getting your orchids to flower**. How do you know if your plants are getting enough sunlight?

Very simply. Your plants will tell you. If the general colour of your orchid leaves is light green and they are sturdy and do not droop, then they are getting enough light.

Longish deep green leaves hanging below the pot are classic signs of too much shade and plants looking like this will not flower regularly.

### GROWING AREA

#### (a) Shadehouse

We grow our cymbidiums in a shadehouse facing north to get as much sunlight as possible. It is constructed of galvanised piping and covered with 70% black knitted shade cloth to provide protection against the very hot summer days; strong winds; occasional hail and frost, and wandering pets and birds. However, as most growers will not have the exposure that we have, they will do best by providing their plants with about 50% shade.

The plants are grown on galvanised mesh benches and the shadehouse floor is covered with blue metal - mainly to make the growing area unattractive to chewing insects such as snails and caterpillars.

#### (b) Pergolas/Trees

Provided enough filtered sunlight is received, cymbidiums can also be successfully grown under pergolas and sparsely leafed trees such as almond, jacaranda and various fruit trees.

#### (c) Open

Many growers, including those living in units or who have a south facing backyard, successfully overcome their lack of sunlight by growing their orchids in the open for 8 months of the year (April - November). Between December and March, they are moved to a shadier area to prevent the leaves getting scorched.

If you are having trouble flowering your plants, try this method. It works.

Note: Cymbidiums should not be grown indoors - as this will rob the plants of valuable sunlight, rain and air movement and will prevent them from growing well and flowering.

### WATERING

Cymbidiums like to be kept moist, but not soaking wet. A guide to watering (using our potting mix) is:  
SUMMER:

Plants should be watered frequently during the hot summer months - usually every 2nd day - but daily when the temperature is 35 degrees Celsius or more.

#### AUTUMN & SPRING:

Water twice a week, i.e. every 3rd or 4th day.

#### WINTER:

There is usually no need to water in winter - except flowering plants under cover.

#### PLANTS in FLOWER:

Water once a week - but not on the blooms.

## WATERING HINTS

When watering, water thoroughly so that the water flushes through the drainage holes to wash away the build-up of excess salts. Avoid sitting the plants on trays or saucers.

Ideally, watering should be done in the morning. Not surprisingly, it is growers who always water in the evenings who experience the most rot problems.

If you're ever in doubt about watering a plant- **DON'T!** - as plants are often killed by over watering but almost never from under watering.

Regularly wetting your plants and growing area at sunset between December and April, will encourage the initiation of flower spikes. A 5 minute overhead (or hand) watering will be sufficient.

## FERTILISING

To obtain the best growing and flowering results from your cymbidiums, the application of fertiliser is essential. Our experience suggests that the less fertiliser used, the easier it is to flower your cymbidiums. There are many suitable fertilisers to choose from. Preferably, only use those containing trace elements.

We use either 12 month Nutricote or Osmocote granules once a year on our plants.

These fertilisers are inorganic relatively high nitrogen fertiliser that encourage plant growth. Use at the rate of:

1 teaspoon for 150mm pots; 2 for 175mm pots; 3 for 200mm pots and 4 teaspoons for 250mm pots.

Even better flowering results can be obtained by also using "Flowering" or "Blossom Booster" type fertilisers. This encourages the production of flower spikes and gives the blooms better size and substance.

"Blossom Booster" fertilisers are simply low nitrogen (N) and high potassium (K) fertilisers.

Use these only on flowering size plants.

## POTTING MIX

Cymbidiums should not be grown in garden soil but will grow successfully in just about anything else. Providing the mix is free draining but capable of holding moisture, has sufficient 'body' to stabilise the plant in the pot and does not break down readily, your plants should do well.

Our potting mix consists of 75% premium coco peat (i.e. coir) & 25% perlite.

It gives excellent growth; makes repotting / dividing easier as the mix can be washed off with no root damage & can be used for cymbidiums of every size, i.e. babies through to large flowering plants.

Prior to potting, a little dolomite/lime is added to provide calcium and magnesium (which are not generally available in most fertilisers).

## REPOTTING & DIVIDING (click on the YouTube icon on my website for a demonstration)

For best results, repotting should be done in Spring (September - November) or Autumn (April & May).

**Repotting** (i.e. replacing the old mix with new) should be done if:

1. a plant has filled its pot;
2. a plant has been in the same pot for more than 3 years;
3. a plant looks sick and you suspect that the mix is 'off'.

**Dividing** (i.e. breaking a plant into several smaller ones) should be done if:

1. a plant is too big for your requirements and has 8 or more green bulbs. Usually, many back bulbs (leafless bulbs) will be evident in the middle.
2. you want more than one piece of a desirable plant.

## Repotting & Dividing hints

- \* Avoid watering plants about a week before dividing as this will make the job easier and quicker.
- \* To give a cymbidium every chance of flowering, aim for divisions of at least 3 or 4 green bulbs.
- \* Avoid dividing plants during the winter months (June to August) as they may develop rot.
- \* We use Steri-prune, a black tar-like pruning paint, to heal any wound or injury to the bulb or rhizome of a divided plant - including back bulbs.
- \* There is no need to throw away the dead looking back bulbs unless they are rotting. They can be used to start new plants if their roots are removed and they are put half way down into the potting mix of small pots.

## OTHER HELPFUL HINTS

- \* Grow your plants tough and you'll have very few problems with them. Insect pests and diseases should not be a problem if you maintain clean, weed-free conditions; bench your plants and don't crowd them; ensure plenty of air circulation, and do not re-use old potting mix.
- \* We rarely use pesticides and insecticides apart from snail pellets.
- \* Leaf tip "die-back" (especially on older leaves) is normal for most plants and is less prevalent in certain varieties and where the quality of the water is better. Don't be too concerned about it unless you find it on new leaves. If you find die-back unsightly, remove it with the plant's name tag (not scissors) to avoid the possible spread of disease.
- \* If a plant is virused (quite often there are tell-tale signs on the leaves), remove it, the pot and label to prevent the virus spreading to other plants. Burning is another option as there is no cure for plant viruses.
- \* To avoid the spread of disease, always wash your hands in warm, soapy water or bleach before repotting / dividing each plant. If you use cutting tools, make sure that they are sterilised after dividing each plant. Sterilisation can be achieved by using a flame (blow torch) or by soaking your tools in liquid trisodium phosphate or full strength sugar soap.
- \* Always label your plants. 4B pencils are ideal. On one side, show the plant name. On the reverse side, indicate when the plant was last repotted or divided, flowering details etc. To write on plastic pots, use a Chinagraph (i.e. Lumocolor permanent) pencil.
- \* You can expect most mature plants to flower every year.
- \* Cymbidiums are outdoor plants but in flower can be enjoyed for limited periods indoors. We suggest that you alternate between having them indoors in a cool well-ventilated place for several days, followed by several days outdoors. Otherwise, have them indoors during the day but put them outdoors under cover before bedtime.
- \* It is not necessary to remove the flowering stems of mature plants (those with 4 or more green bulbs) to ensure the plants flower again in the following season. However, removal of the stems about a month after the last flower has opened is recommended for small plants (those with three or less green bulbs).
- \* Contrary to popular opinion, cymbidium orchids do not have to be pot bound to flower. In fact, pot bound or crowded plants are more difficult to water and being top heavy, are much more likely to be blown over in strong winds, and are likely to be in a potting mix that needs replacing.
- \* If a flower stem is removed from a plant shortly after all the blooms are fully open, you can expect the flowers to remain in good condition for about 4-5 weeks, provided they are kept in a cool place, in water to which is added a drop of bleach, and about 1/2" of the stem is snipped off weekly and the water changed.
- \* How can you tell the difference between a new growth and a new flower spike? Generally speaking, new spikes are bullet-like or index finger shaped, whereas growths are not as round. Furthermore, flower spikes rarely appear before January, whereas new growths often start appearing as early as August.
- \* To avoid spotting of your flowers, place plants under cover (i.e. out of the rain) as soon as the first blooms begin to open.

## **SUMMARY**

To get the **best flowering results**, do not mollycoddle your cymbidiums. Simply:

# Find the **sunniest** spot to grow your plants and then leave them largely alone.  
i.e. practise "healthy neglect".

# Cool your plants during summer and early autumn by wetting them and the growing area at least three or four times a week at sunset.

# Don't give them too much fertiliser. Remember, in nature, they receive very little.

# Water sensibly (refer to "Watering" section).

# When the flower spikes first show (most will appear between January and May), protect them from snails and caterpillars by using appropriate baits.

## **TRADING HOURS**

**(May - October)**

**10 am - 4 pm**

**Wednesday - Sunday**

Closed Monday, Tuesday and public holidays.

November to April - open by appointment.

Web Address: [www.springfieldorchids.com.au](http://www.springfieldorchids.com.au)

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If you need any assistance, please ring me or pop in. I'd love to help.

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