

Cattleya

KAT-lee-ah

Cattleyas are among the most popular orchids. Cattleyas and their related hybrids come in many colours, shapes, forms and sizes. This sheet is a general guide to basic cattleya culture. Like many other cultivated orchids, cattleyas are epiphytes, or air plants. They have developed water-storage organs, called pseudobulbs, and have large, fleshy roots covered with a spongy, water-retentive velamen. They are accustomed to being dry at the roots between waterings, and therefore should be potted in free-draining media.

Light: is the most important factor in growing and flowering cattleyas, whether in a greenhouse or in the home. Bright light to some sun should be given to the plants, with no direct sun in the middle of the day. This means an east, shaded south (as with a sheer curtain) or west window in the home, and 50 to 70 percent full sun in a greenhouse. Leaves should be a medium green colour, pseudobulbs erect and requiring no staking.

Temperature: should be 10 to 15 C at night and 20 to 30 C during the day. Seedlings should have night temperatures two to five degrees higher. A seven to ten degree differential between day and night is recommended, especially for mature plants. Higher day temperatures can be tolerated (up to 35 C), if humidity, air circulation and shading are increased.

Water: should be provided in two ways: in the pot by watering and in the air as humidity. Watering in the container is dictated by many criteria: size and type of the vessel, temperature, light, etc. Mature cattleyas need to dry out thoroughly before being watered again. Seedlings need more constant moisture. If in doubt, it's best to wait a day or two until watering. Plants in active growth need more water than plants that are resting.

Humidity: should be 50 to 80 percent for cattleyas. This can be provided in the home by placing the plants on trays of gravel, only partially filled with water so that the plants do not sit in the water. Air should always be moving around the plants to prevent fungal or bacterial disease, especially if high humidity or cool temperatures exist. In the greenhouse, the humidity is best increased by use of a humidifier. Evaporative cooling increases humidity while cooling the air.

Fertilise: on a regular schedule. In bark, a high-nitrogen (such as 30-10-10) formulation, or a similar proportion, is used. Otherwise, use a balanced fertiliser. When in active growth, plants need fertiliser at least every two weeks, and when not actively growing, once a month. Fertiliser can also be applied with every watering at one-quarter the recommended dilution. Thorough flushing with clear water every month is recommended to prevent the build up of fertiliser salts.

Potting: is necessary when the rhizome of the plants protrudes over the edge of the pot or the potting medium starts to break down and drain poorly (usually after two to three years). It is best to re-pot just before new roots sprout from the rhizome, after flowering or in the spring. Mature cattleyas are usually potted in coarser potting material than are seedlings. Until a plant has at least six mature pseudobulbs, it generally should be put into a larger pot and not divided. If dividing a plant, three to five pseudobulbs per division are required. Select a pot that will allow for approximately two years of growth before crowding the pot. Pile mix against one side of the pot and cut off any dead roots. Spread the firm, live roots over the pile, with the cut rhizome against the side of the pot. Fill the pot with medium, working it around the roots. Pack firmly and stake if necessary. Keep the plant humid, shaded and dry at the roots until new root growth is seen.

Help: Why not come along and join EASTERN DISTRICT ORCHID SOCIETY INC (EDOS)

E.D.O.S. holds a meeting on the fourth Thursday of the month (except December) at the Bayside Uniting Church Hall, 420 Wondall Road, Manly West starting at 8.00 pm. Before the meeting commencing at 7.30 pm experienced members conduct a twenty minute talk on different aspects of orchid growing etc.

A monthly newsletter is published and distributed to all members.

For further information please contact the Secretary on 3286 4910, email secretary@edos.org.au; or www.edos.org.au