



Phrag Living Fire (Sorcerer's Apprentice x Besseae)

CULTURE NOTES ON PHRAGMIPEDIUM

BY TONY BECK

Phrags were first described in 1827 they grow from Mexico to South America mostly in the ground or on rocks and a few in trees, very often found on river banks where they can be submerged during periods of heavy rain.

WATERING

Is most important, natural rain water is by far the best, I have found collected rain water is little different to tap water, always water completely so the water pours from the drain holes, in warmer weather stand the pots in shallow saucers of water. Be careful not to let water sit in the plants in bud as there is always a chance of damping off, regardless of the temperature or time of year always keep the mix damp, never let the mix dry out completely. In summer they require watering everyday, Besseae, Caudatum & crosses with these in the parentage can be grown a little drier. Be sure to flush out any salt build up as excess salts can cause the tips of the leaves to go brown.

LIGHTING REQUIREMENTS

Bright light without heavy afternoon sun with larger plants under 1 layer of 75% knitted shade cloth and smaller plants under 2 layers. For those technically minded 2500 to 3000 foot candles of light appears best. New seedlings especially just out of flasks are best in a miniature plastic shade house inside the orchid house, with adequate air movement.

HUMIDITY

50-60% works for me, ferns or Broms and ground cover under the benches, floor misting and wall moisture works like an old fashioned meat safe plus closely grown plants in saucers of water all help maintain good humidity levels.

Fungus and rot problems are best dealt with by simply cutting the infected portion of leaf or growth off and treat with any fungicide, I use Mancozeb plus Sulphur (Richgrow brand).

PESTS

Spray with Lawsban or use Ant Rid baits placed under a saucer or similar to keep dry, snails and slugs similar baits, scale, mealy bugs, aphids, mites etc I use

Homemade White Oil mixture which consists of:

1 cup Grapeseed oil or similar vegetable oil (cooking oil)

½ cup Water

1 Teaspoon washing up detergent

Place into screw top glass jar and shake vigorously, the mix will turn into a white oil concentrate.

Add 25mm of concentrate to each litre of water in any standard spray bottle, this is effective on most types of scale, increase strength to use on Lemon trees etc.

I also add Confidor at the rate of 4 drops per litre if you have trouble with Mealy bugs etc.

Remembering not to spray in the heat of the day and never in full sun or you will burn your plants.

FERTILISER

Organic extra pellets in the top quarter of the mix when potting up, Paph green fertiliser once per week, every second week add Calcium Nitrate mixed separately and add to your fertiliser tank/equipment. Note, lime is not beneficial to Phrags and in fact will kill the plant, it is also worth noting as most of us grow Paphs, lime is not beneficial to all Paphs, check before using.

POTTING MEDIA

Repotting smaller plants each year, larger plants every 2 years in a mix 60% Jumbo Perlite, 40% Aus-Grow bark with larger bark in the base of the pot. Under potting will generally bring better flowering results than over potting, which can bring lush growth with fewer flowers

STAKING AND GENERAL MAINTENANCE

Always face buds towards the morning sun, you can either tie the flower spikes up or you can stake in front of the flower spike and push it back with green tie wire or pipe cleaner or something similar, pushing will sometimes result in a more natural looking presentation, I have never found the need to dress or manipulate any of my flowers.

Removing old leaves is a vital part of general maintenance, always pull yellow or dying leaves off, never cut them off, if you have trouble pulling them off, cut the leaf in half sideways then split the leaf down the middle to the base of the plant and pull from each side of the split leaf, you will find it can then be removed easily. That will allow the new roots that were confined by the old leaf to move directly down into the mix, this will increase the vigour of your plant and you could expect an immediate boost to your plants growth, this can sometimes be the difference between achieving the flowering stage or not in that year.

PLEASE NOTE

The above cultural notes are a guide only and there are many variables to all above suggestions, however this is what works for me in my conditions.

Happy Growing
TONY BECK