

# Paphiopedilums

## Growing Paphiopedilums (Slipper Orchids) in the Toowoomba area

Slipper orchids were so named in the 1800s as the pouch at the front of the orchid resembles a lady's slipper. Its name literally translates as 'Slipper of Aphrodite' and an apt name it is, probably the most aptly named orchid.

Paphiopedilums come from Asiatic countries i.e. China, Vietnam, India, Burma, Indonesia, New Guinea and Borneo. The latter is home of the 'KING' of orchids *Paphiopedilum rothschildianum*, which is a particularly spectacular flower.

They grow mainly at low to moderate altitudes and live mostly on the forest floor or on rock faces where leaf litter congregates. Their protection from the elements is that they are under the protection of the dense rainforest or clumped grasses.

The main classes of hybrid orchids grown are:

- (1) *Classic*. These are a complex hybrid with many parents in their makeup, e.g. Paph Highland Luck.
- (2) *Maudiae*. These are a quicker growing hybrid and have *callosum/barbatum/lawrencianum* in their background, e.g. Paph Red Maud.
- (3) *Multi Floral*. These produce long stems with several flowers on each, e.g. Paph St Swithin.
- (4) *Novelty*. Which are the remainder, e.g. Paph Steve Waters.

As with most orchids the main considerations are temperature and humidity, light, water, fertiliser, potting mix, air movement and pests and diseases,.

Paphiopedilums are an easy orchid to grow and are one of the few that can grow and flower without any roots under them. (This is obviously not the desired way).

**Temperature and Humidity:** The ideal requirement is for a temperature from 10°C at night but they will tolerate down to 5°C for brief periods as long as there is no frost on them. The daytime temperature should not exceed 28°C. However, these can be exceeded briefly so long as the humidity is maintained at around 50 to 65%.

**Light:** In Toowoomba, Paphs require moderate to heavy shade and do not like the afternoon sun. The growths should be a nice medium green colour, too dark and you will get plenty of growth and no flowers, too light and yellowy green leaves and this shows stress in the plant.

**Water:** Paphs are sympodial (in that they do not have bulbs to store water) and like to be damp but not wet. Ideally they should be watered preferably with rain water approximately twice a week during the hotter months and cut back to once or twice a fortnight during the colder months. You will have to experiment to perfect this.

**Fertiliser:** The big thing to remember here is ¼-½ strength and often i.e. almost every watering is ideal. There are a great range of fertilisers on the market today and most are very good. There is no harm in alternating your fertilisers i.e. chemical based and organic. The best fertiliser to use for Paphs contains a ratio as follows: N 12% - 15%; P 5%; K 12% - 15%. This can be used all year round as if you have a mixed Paph collection they grow continuously and flower all year round.

**Potting Mix:** There are various mixes being used by growers in the Toowoomba region and here a two of them. The most popular are (1) the straight orchid bark 75% and charcoal 25% mix, or (2) orchid bark, charcoal, perlite and coconut husk chips in equal portions. Both of these mixes would use small/medium bark, charcoal, coco chips and jumbo perlite. It is most important to foster a good healthy root system as they have no storage organs. If you un-pot a plant and find very few healthy roots you should question your potting mix and watering regime as a fine mix and too much water can be dangerous.

The most popular pots are deep ones and the majority of mature plants will fit into 80mm and 100mm sizes unless they are of specimen size. Potting should be carried out at least every two years and you must remove all dead roots at this time otherwise the roots will add to the possibility of rot appearing. Repotting or potting should be carried out after flowering. Paphs seem to be an orchid that doesn't mind being potted at any time of the year. However care should be taken not to repot during very hot or cold weather.

**Air Movement:** This is another important factor in successfully growing Paphs. They need constant and good air movement. Weld mesh type benches are good as the air can move through the benches as well as movement from above.

**Pests and Diseases:** These are few with the main ones being mealy bug, aphids and rot in the outside leaf base both of these can be controlled with off the counter insecticides and fungicides. You must keep ants under control as they bring the pests into your growing area.



*P. St Swithin*



*P. Highland Luck*



*P. Steve Waters*



*P. Red Maude*

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Venue: St. Paul's Hall, Cnr. James and Phillip Sts, Toowoomba