

Cymbidiums

Growing Cymbidiums in the Toowoomba area

Description: Cymbidiums are native to the Himalayan foothills of the Asian continent through China and some of south eastern Asia in areas of higher elevation, with a number of species found throughout Australia.

For our climate here in the Toowoomba region Cymbidiums are probably the easiest and least demanding orchid to grow. Modern hybrids are also easier to flower than those available 20 years ago. Cymbidiums hybrids now come in a full range of sizes and spike habits from the very large and imposing to the small and dainty. They can have upright, arching or pendulous racemes with colours ranging from white, yellow, green, pink and red and some even have a fragrance.

Growing Conditions: Cymbidiums are tolerant of most climatic conditions and will tolerate light frosts. However, you will need to protect the plants and flower spikes from heavy frosts. To flower consistently in our area, the plants need to cool down after the hotter days of October to December. A fall of 10-12°C or more overnight in these months appears to trigger flower spike initiation. This drop in temperature can often be achieved by simply giving the plants a watering in the evening of hot days so that evaporation can cool the plants through the night. Air movement can also help cool plants in the hotter times of the year. Quite a few of the Intermediate and Miniature Cymbidiums have been bred using some of the Australian species and are not so cool dependant.

Light: Good light is also important for consistent flowering. For mature plants about 50% shade is ideal while 70% provides better seedling growth and allows an assortment of other orchids to be grown with your Cymbidiums. The length of time your plants receive sunlight is critical and plants will invariably provide better and more consistent flowers if they are exposed from morning to night. Having said all that, they can be grown successfully under trees in dappled sunlight with exposure to morning sun. Leaf colour is a good guide. If the leaves are yellowish they are probably getting too much sun and dark green indicates not enough.

Watering: The frequency of watering your Cymbidiums will depend on a few factors such as temperature, air movement and potting media. They like to be moist at all times so watering could vary from daily in summer to as much as fortnightly in winter. Watering in the evening in the hotter months. Water well with each watering and ensure water is flushing through the pot.

Fertilising: Good balanced water soluble fertilisers are very effective and can be used regularly – almost every watering in summer and less frequently in winter. The strength of fertiliser should reflect the plants growth rate. Stronger at peak growing times and less when growth slows. Half recommended strength is a good place to start. The period from January to April is the peak growth period and plants should be fertilised accordingly. Fertilisers high in urea should be avoided as this can lead to rapid breakdown of potting mix and root damage. Read the labels. Commercial Cymbidium growers vary the composition of their fertilisers throughout the year and general consensus is to provide mature plants with a lower Nitrogen content fertiliser during the period of flower spike initiation that is from October to December then increasing the Nitrogen from January to September. Research and experience show that a high Nitrogen fertiliser during the spike initiation phase results in less flower spikes and more new growths. By reducing the Nitrogen content in the fertiliser this in fact increases the Potassium and Phosphorus levels accordingly. Remember, even when plants are divided and repotted the aim is to grow and mature a growth by flower initiation stage next year.

Seedlings benefit from a higher Nitrogen fertiliser throughout the entire year to keep them growing satisfactorily. Slow release fertilisers (6 month) at potting time can be a good backup. A very successful grower uses a base fertiliser which is added to the potting mix prior to potting. This base fertiliser consists of 1.4kg Blood & Bone, 280g Sulphate of Potash, 850g powdered Superphosphate and 3kg of Dolomite. This is dusted over the potting mix and mixed in at the rate of 650g per cubic meter of mix.

Potting Media: Potting mix needs to be well aerated and free draining but still remain damp for a reasonable period. Some of the bagged mixes sold at larger hardware stores and supermarket outlets are often inferior. Cymbidium compost is available from the larger specialist orchid nurseries. Coconut husk is now an important component in Cymbidium potting mixes but ensure it is thoroughly soaked and washed to remove salts. Some possible mixes are as follows:

(a)

- 70% Coconut Husk Chips
- 30% Coarse or Super coarse Perlite

(b)

- 33% Composted Pine Bark
- 33% Coconut Husk Chips
- 33% Coarse Perlite

(c)

- 40% Composted Pine bark
- 25% Peanut Shells
- 25% Perlite
- 10% Peat Moss

Composted bark is produced by purchasing a large quantity of pine bark (a trailer load) from a landscape supplier and then on a hard surface lay a thin layer of bark which is then dusted liberally with a mixture of Blood and Bone, Dolomite, Powdered Superphosphate and Urea. Cover with another layer of bark and then the additives and so on until all the bark is in the pile. Damp this down and compost for 3-4 months turning it every few weeks.

Pots and Potting: Plastic pots are used for Cymbidiums as terracotta pots dry out too quickly and the larger sizes are prohibitively expensive. Cymbidiums can be repotted at almost any time of the year but avoid the really hot times as this can stress the plants. After flowering is a popular time to repot. When breaking up Cymbidiums, care should be taken to keep the plants in at least 3 bulb divisions to ensure they flower next year.

Pests and Diseases: Red spider mite or 2 spotted mite can be a problem in summer. Control with a miticide or Pest Oil. Scale can be checked using Pest Oil and Rogor as can mealy bug. Confidor also helps control aphids on flower spikes. Fungal and bacterial problems can be minimised by providing good air movement around your plants and the use of one of the many fungicides/bacteriacides if necessary. Take care not to spray flowers directly as damage can occur and always use the sprays at the manufacturer's recommendations. Should your troubles persist seek help from a nursery or experienced grower.

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