

Cattleyas

Growing Cattleyas in the Toowoomba area

Introduction

Growing orchids in the Toowoomba region is quite different from growing orchids on the coastal strip of Queensland. This certainly applies to the genus *Cattleya*. The region experiences quite a dissimilar climate to that on the coast. These climatic difficulties can be overcome and in fact can allow orchid enthusiasts to grow a much wider range of genus from subtropical to very cool. A typical show at the Toowoomba Orchid Society will have a vastly larger range of genera than most other areas in Queensland.

Housing

Cattleya housing can be as simple or as elaborate as the budget allows. Shadecloth with 70% shade is quite suitable with some protection on the western and southern sides especially in the winter. The Shadecloth roof is best covered in clear Solarweave or similar material in winter to offer protection from rain. *Cattleyas* can survive quite cold conditions provided they are kept rather dry.

Humidity/Air Movement

Low humidity and high temperatures can be a real problem to an orchid collection. Having gravel beneath benches and keeping this moist with either a sprinkler system or hosing under the plants during the hotter, dryer days can overcome this problem. This procedure not only increases humidity but lowers temperature as well. Having the northern and eastern sides only covered in Shadecloth helps air movement. A fan can also be useful.

Watering

Incorrect watering is perhaps the greatest cause for loss of plants. Overwatering will result in rotting of roots while insufficient watering causes loss of vigour in the plant. In this area watering is required every two to three days in the summer and about once every six to ten days in the winter. Do not water on overcast days in the winter. It is better to wait for a clear sunny day. A misting of the floor of the house will help at these times.

Fertilising

Successful *Cattleya* growers use $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the rate of the manufacturer's recommended dilution every time they water with a flush of clear water fortnightly when the plants are in a growth phase. If you don't have time, the alternative is to use a slightly stronger brew - $\frac{1}{2}$ strength once a week or $\frac{3}{4}$ strength fortnightly especially in the growing season. Fertilising can be scaled back in the cooler months as growth is also slowing. Some growers use Seasol in the cooler which may be helpful in the plant surviving extreme cold.

Repotting

Cattleyas can benefit from regular repotting. Some growers repot every year and others repot every second year. The size of the plant in the pot can dictate this as the plant should be repotted before new roots climb out of the pot. Repotting is best done just as new roots are pushing out the bottom of the growth but if you can't be watching that closely any time from spring onwards but avoiding very hot weather.

Potting mixes vary with growers but a good place to start is just orchid bark with or without some charcoal or perlite added. The size of the bark mix should vary with the pot/plant size.

Winter

Winter, mainly the time between May and September, can prove to be harsh for the growing of Cattleyas in our area unless one takes steps to provide a friendlier climate. The main thing to remember is to keep the plants relatively dry and if watered they should be dry by evening. The weather forecast can also be of assistance so don't water if heavy frosts are forecast.

If you have a warmer sunroom or patio facing north or east it may be beneficial to shift your Cattleyas to that area for a short while.

General

There are many books covering the cultivation of Cattleyas and some of these in conjunction with the above notes should give success in the cultivation of these genera.

Good growing

Disclaimer: These notes are supplied in good faith and Toowoomba Orchid Society Inc and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.

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