

Softcane Dendrobiums

Growing Softcane Dendrobiums in the Toowoomba Area

Softcane dendrobiums or *nobile* type, as the main species of the group is called, are probably one of the easiest of all orchids to grow and provided a few rules are followed are also easy to flower. These dendrobiums are native to the foothills of the Indian Himalayas up to an altitude of 1500 meters. Based on this, it is obvious that they will thrive in warm to hot, wet (monsoonal) summers and dryer cool to cold winters. These conditions can easily be provided in the Toowoomba region.

The species from which modern hybrids are derived lives in the tops of trees with a sparse covering of leaves to filter sunlight. The plants can take very bright conditions in spring and summer with just enough shade that the leaves don't suffer sunburn. In winter full sun is acceptable as the leaves generally drop prior to flower buds being produced.

Softcane dendrobiums grow well in hanging pots and can be hung high under 50% shade in the growing season. After the last leaf on the growth has matured (around April – May) the plants can be hung outside in full sun. On the clothesline is a good spot if allowed.

Because of the monsoonal conditions in summer in their native region, water and fertilize heavily from spring to late summer. By April, fertilizer and water should be tapered off then withheld almost completely to allow the wintering of the canes and nodes from which the flower buds will emerge. The canes should be exposed to strong light for their entire length to promote good flower production. Softcane dendrobiums flower in spring, August to November.

Fertiliser

Too much nitrogen fertiliser towards the end of the growing season and into winter will cause the plant to produce adventitious growths (kiekies or aerals) from the flower nodes. While this is fine if you want to increase your collection, few flowers are produced. High potassium, low nitrogen fertiliser (say 10:8:24) at $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 gram per litre is recommended weekly throughout the growing season. Slow release fertiliser is not a good option as some residual fertiliser may be available throughout winter. No fertiliser should be given after 1st April.

Potting/Potting Mix

Whatever potting mix is used it must be coarse enough to allow the roots access to air. Commonly used potting mixes are small/medium bark, perlite, coconut husk chips or a mixture of all three. Repotting should be carried out after flowering if the mix has broken down or the plant has outgrown the pot. If the mix is in good condition it's just a matter of positioning the unpotted root ball in a larger pot and filling with mix.

Watering

Water twice a week in September and October, 3 or more times a week from November to March and about once a fortnight from April to August.

Kiekies/ Aerial Growths

All Softcane dendrobiums can and will produce these growths if the plant is overfed at the wrong time or stressed by damaged roots. It is a natural survival strategy. These growths should be left on the parent plant until they produce their second growth when they can be removed and potted as a new plant.

Pests and Diseases

Caterpillars love the leaves of softcanes and should be controlled with Confidor, Maverick or the safer alternative, Dipel. Red spider mite and false spider mite can be a problem and should be sprayed with Kelthane. Fungus diseases should be controlled with a quality fungicide especially in extended overcast and rainy periods.

Good Growing

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