



INDOOR
PLANTS
GARDENING
SERIES



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CATASETUM Orchid

This unusual group of orchids offers fascinating, waxy flowers that often have the peculiar habit of discharging their pollen masses (pollinia) onto pollinators. The object of that odd mechanism is to cause the pollen to stick to a bee's body, as well as make the bee move on to another flower. Almost always deciduous, the pseudobulbous plants have strict growing and resting periods. Most flower before entering a dormant period when they drop their leaves.

Light: Should be strong, especially near the end of the growth period (late summer). Early in the annual growth cycle, plants will tolerate less light, from 1,500 to 3,000 foot-candles. Plants grow best with light levels of 3,000 to 6,000 foot-candles, or 1/2 to 3/4 full sun. As pseudobulbs mature, harden them by giving slightly more light.

Temperatures: Reflect the fact that these orchids are native to hot tropical areas and grow during the summer months. During this growing period, day temperatures of 80^o to 100^o F, and night temperatures of 60^o to 65^o F are beneficial. After the growth matures, temperatures can be reduced to 55^o F at night, with day temperatures to 70^o to 85^o F. While actively growing, plants should be given as much water, warmth and humidity as they can tolerate without foliar damage, as well as ample fertilizer. These plants are heavy feeders and the goal is to produce the largest pseudobulbs as possible by the onset of late summer.

Water: Is a critical factor for the production of large pseudobulbs that result in best flowering. A great quantity of water must be stored by the plant in a relatively short growing season. Water heavily as new leaves are forming. As the pseudobulb matures, gradually reduce the watering frequency. Leaves will yellow and drop. At this time, watering should be stopped completely until new growth begins. Water during this dormant period only if the pseudobulbs shrivel severely.

Humidity: Should be 40 to 60 percent. This can be provided in the home by placing the plants on trays of gravel, only partially filled with water so that the plants do not sit in the water. Air should always be moving around the plants to prevent fungal or bacterial disease, especially if high humidity or cool temperatures exist. In the greenhouse, the humidity is best increased by the use of a humidifier. Evaporative cooling increases humidity while cooling the air.

Fertilize: and water regularly to produce strong pseudobulbs. Use a high nitrogen formulation (such as 30-10-10) while plants are in active growth, slowly tapering off as pseudobulbs form. A blossom booster formulation (such as 10-30-20) should be used in the autumn, except for plants that normally bloom in the spring. Frequent applications of a dilute concentration of fertilizer is more effective than occasional applications of a stronger concentration.

Potting: Should be timed to coincide with the initiation of new growth, usually in the spring. New roots will be produced quickly at that time, and plants will experience minimal setback. These plants have vigorous root systems and require a rich, moist potting medium during the growing season. Many growers bare-root their plants during the resting period to ensure dryness at that time. Fine grade media are common for smaller pots; medium grade media are used only in larger pots. Sphagnum moss is used successfully for plants in many areas, as it provides tremendous water and fertilizer holding capacities. Some plants can be grown on slabs of tree fern or other material, which makes it easier to keep them dry during dormancy, however it is harder to keep them moist while growing. When well grown, these orchids can be divided down to one mature pseudobulb and will then flower on the next mature growth. Spider mites are a common pest of these orchids when in leaf. Control spider mites by keeping humidity high or spraying with recommended miticides.