

HOW TO GROW

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE EPIPHYTIC ORCHIDS

These notes have been specifically prepared to assist you as a new grower of Australian epiphytic orchids. Briefly, epiphytic orchids grow on trees in the relatively warm eastern coastal ranges, attaching themselves by means of an extensive root system. As their roots are exposed to the air, they have adapted to absorb nutrient materials from decaying bark and leaf litter and moisture from rain and the atmosphere.

A large number of these orchids can be successfully grown in Melbourne given some consideration to their special requirements. (Check that they are not tropical before buying unless, of course, they are to be housed in a heated glasshouse.) The ideal situation is a warm, humid, frost-free area with filtered sunlight. Glasshouses, bushhouses or shadehouses are suitable, but if these are not available there are areas in most gardens where there is some shelter from strong winds, direct sunlight and where a degree of humidity can be maintained.

Many epiphytic orchids can be grown in pots in a pine bark mix. Other coarse materials such as gravel or treefern fibre may also be included. As orchids do not like wet feet, it is essential that the potting mix be pieces of not less than 1cm in diameter and drainage holes in the pot be properly open. The plant should be potted into the smallest pot that comfortably accommodates the roots, and the crown should be raised to the level of the top of the pot.

Epiphytic orchids can also be grown mounted on a piece of treefern slab, cork, or branches of a permanent bark tree. When mounting on a slab the plant should be firmly tied on with nylon fishing line, plastic-covered wire, budding tape, old stockings, or similar inert material. The tie should firmly hold the

roots and the plant so that they cannot move. To hang the plant, place a piece of wire around or through the top of the slab.

Plants in pots should be watered daily during the hottest months, gradually reducing frequency during the cooler months to once or twice weekly. Watering of the orchids on slabs is most important and care should be taken that they are kept moist during the warm months. This may require watering several times a day at the height of summer. During winter, according to conditions, watering once a week may be sufficient.

Feeding is not essential, but plants do benefit from regular applications of one-third strength fertiliser during the growing season.

Epiphytic orchids are not overly susceptible to disease but can be severely damaged by caterpillars, slugs and snails. Insecticides and baits will keep these pests under control.

Flowering depends largely on the size of the plant, growing conditions and, in particular, the amount of light received. Usually, if a plant is mature, healthy and makes good progress during the growing season, it can be expected to flower.

A comprehensive book, *Cultivation of Australian Native Orchids*, is available from the Society for a small price. It contains detailed information on how to grow most of the commonly available orchids.

New members and visitors are always welcome at the Australasian Native Orchid Society.

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