

ONCIDIINAE ORCHIDS



Oncidiinae Alliance orchids are one of the largest groups of orchids distributed throughout the American tropics from Florida in the USA to Argentina, with the greatest diversity in Brazil and the Andes. Most of the species are epiphytes, that is they grow on trees or lithophytes - they grow on rocks. Oncidiinae orchids are relatively easy to grow if their few particular requirements can be met. The beautiful, fragrant flowers can be enjoyed almost year round and can last for 4-8 weeks.

LIGHT: The light should be fairly bright but indirect. If summer day temperatures are high, light levels can be reduced to cool the growing area.

TEMPERATURE: While many texts quote ideal temperature ranges of 25 deg C max to 15 deg C min for this alliance, we have found plants cope very well in Adelaide in spite of low to mid 40's in summer (with relative humidity less than 10% at the same time) and as low as 0-1 deg C in winter. Success is all about watering – twice or more a day at summer peak to once weekly in winter. Moderate to high humidity is often cited as needed by these orchids but experience in Adelaide strongly suggests otherwise and it is exceedingly difficult to attain and maintain on a windy day outdoors in a shade house.

WATERING: Water should be plentiful, but make sure to let excess water to drain. The potting medium should just begin to dry before watering again. This may mean watering every 2-7 days, depending on the weather, pot size and material, and type of potting medium. Accordion pleating on leaves is a symptom of insufficient water or humidity. As with other orchids from high rainfall areas, the Oncidiinae orchids are particularly sensitive to poor water quality, which will give poor roots and leaf tip burn.

FERTILIZING: Plants should be fertilized regularly with a diluted solution while the plants are actively growing; applications of 20-20-20 formulations as frequently as every watering to infrequently as twice a month are ideal. If the weather is overcast, applications once a month are sufficient. Some growers use a high phosphorous 10-30-20 blossom booster formulation as plants approach flowering, to increase flower count and substance.

POTTING: This should be done as new growth becomes about half mature, which is usually in Spring or Autumn. These plants need to be under-potted so when repotting leave enough room for 1-2 years growth. Under-potting also enables the grower to provide the more frequent watering of these plants as the smaller pots dry more quickly and evenly when filled with roots. A fine grade of potting medium with excellent drainage is required, because the medium is kept moist, annual or biannual repotting is normal. Spread the roots over a cone of potting medium and fill in around the roots. Recent use of Canna Aqua brand or other good quality clay pellets which dry very rapidly after watering and which do not rot nor promote rot have given very much improved results with the Oncidium Alliance orchids. Use of "Dynamic Lifter" or "Rapid Raiser" brands of pelletised Chicken Manure are also very effective fertiliser with clay pellets.

SOUTH COAST ORCHID CLUB OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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