

CATTLEYA ORCHIDS

No other commonly grown orchid is as strikingly flamboyant as the large Cattleya. However, the Cattleya family of orchids is a huge group of plants with great variation of form, colour and size. The large white or purple Cattleya that we know so well is one branch of the family. There are several closely allied genera of orchids that are always included in the Cattleya Alliance. These have been hybridised with the Cattleya to produce intergeneric hybrids that are often abbreviated in code:



C. = Cattleya, Lc. = Laeliocattleya, Epc. = Epicattleya, Bc. = Brassocattleya, Rlc. = Rhyncholaeliocattleya, Ctt. = Cattlianthe, etc.

GROWTH HABIT: Cattleyas make successive growths from the base of last year's growth. Therefore they are of a sympodial habit. They are epiphytes, which means they grow on trees or rocks in their natural habitat. The major part of their root growth is accustomed to being exposed to the air. Aerial roots, if produced, are very beneficial to the plants and absorb dilute liquid fertiliser very effectively.

GROWING CONDITIONS: Cattleya plants can be successfully grown in shade houses in South Australian climatic conditions but they will require protection from the winter rains. Heating is not necessary but if available it can be used. Most Cattleyas can be grown in cold plant houses, enjoy good ventilation and air circulation, and can also be hung on mesh frames rather than flat benches. This not only saves space but also helps provide good air circulation. This type of culture can be inspected by a visit to a nursery.

POTTING MEDIUM: Cattleyas must be grown in a very open potting medium that drains freely and therefore dries out quickly. Medium grade bark (15mm) for mature plants and small grade (10mm) bark for smaller plants. Cattleyas do not enjoy being overpotted and should be placed in a pot that allows for 1-2 years of growth. Recently, use of Canna Aqua or other quality brand of clay pellets has produced superior roots and better plants.

FERTILIZING: Use of a regular feeding programme is recommended. Use a soluble fertilizer and at half strength weekly or full strength fortnightly. Use Blossom Booster from December to June and Hi – Nitrogen July to November. Plant Starter may be used at monthly intervals for smaller plants or as a growth activator as required. If potted in quality clay pellets, use of pelletised chicken manure brands such as "Rapid Raiser" or "Dynamic Lifter" are very effective.

WATERING: During the hot summer months, frequent damping of the growing area will boost humidity levels. Up to twice daily watering if over 38 deg C will safely reduce water stress. The Cattleya alliance orchids do not like continually wet potting medium and must be allowed to dry out – especially during cooler periods when they may benefit if kept in good light and air movement but under cover.

SOUTH COAST ORCHID CLUB OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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