

Habenaria Care

by Windswept in Time Orchids

Habenaria are a pantropical group of orchids with about eight hundred described species. Most of the ones in cultivation have a wet and dry season in their native environment. To survive the dry season the Habenaria go dormant and seem to die back to the root system, until the next rainy season. Because they are tropical plants, they like to be warm for the most part. They seem to enjoy bright light, but not hot sunshine (with a few exceptions). Light similar to what you might give an Oncidium orchid seems to work well. As these plants are dormant part of the year, it is important to fertilize the plants when they are in the growth phase.

A year in the life of Habenaria and Pecteilis.

We plant the tuberoid (similar to a little potato, but usually with only one eye) in a potting mix that will hold a fair amount of moisture, but still drain well. Generally, we put the end of the tuberoid with the eye about one half inch below the surface of the potting mix and leave room in the pot to add additional mix later on if needed. Once the tuberoid begins to grow and sends up a rosette of leaves the plant wants regular waterings and feeding. (We are now in the rainy season, and the plants don't generally dry out for about 6-9 months) The rosette of leaves will mature and begin to send up a flower stem from the middle. The plant will develop flower buds which open from the bottom up. After all the flowers have done their thing, the plant will begin to die back, starting from the top down, and the leaf tips towards the center. During this die-back period, the plant is putting all its available energy into the root system where it will form new tuberoids to get it through the upcoming dry season. After the plant has died back, and the leaves are a crunchy brown, water sparingly. Remember dry season does not mean a desert. The plant should get small amounts of water from time to time. Repotting should be done about three weeks after the leaves are crunchy brown. Do not repot once the leaves are up, as you will damage the tender root tips and may jeopardize the formation of new tuberoids. Some Habenaria grow to be quite tall. Should your plant need a stake to support the flower stem, tape it to the outside of the pot to avoid damage to the developing tuberoids. Different Habenaria have different lengths of dormancy often depending on temperature and moisture. Generally, the plants have an annual cycle lasting twelve months. Some of the Hybrids I grow will go through a complete cycle in as little as eight months, but I grow very warm. Remember everyone does things a little differently depending on their own conditions, your Habenaria has never read the instructions book, so you must be observant and take your cues from the plants you are growing. I'm happy to answer questions if you have them. You can reach me through my website at windsweptorchids.com

