

CULTURAL HINTS FOR JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH



(with Brian Steven)

The following brief guide should help Clivia enthusiasts during the months of January, February and March.

PESTS AND DISEASES

These months are the main months that growers have to look out for pests and diseases around their clivias, and of course later in the year after winter they could appear again.

The following are the main pests and diseases that growers should keep under control.

PESTS — MEALY BUG: The main worry for Clivia growers. These bugs are very small 3mm long, creamy white bodied insects covered by threads protruding. They are found on the newer growths. If not controlled can really make a mess of the plant. Light infestations can be controlled by wiping a cotton bud, dipped in metho or a surgical spirit on to the insects. Sprays and dusts can be used for larger outbreaks. Confider is a very successful insecticide.

I have used a much cheaper method, using Yates tomato dust (active constituents Sulphur, copper oxychloride and Spinosad.) The Sulphur and copper are protectant fungicides. Sulphur is also a miticide and Spinosad is an insecticide derived from natural soil bacteria. The Tomato Dust containing the insecticide carbaryl is not available any more. For those who like to use the natural sprays of course Pyrethrum is the insecticide.

SNAILS AND SLUGS: These should be kept under control at all times especially now that most areas have had good rain. It is marvelous what a slug or snail can do to a lovely Clivia flower if they get the chance. Check plants and pots regularly, especially during damp weather. Keep them in check with one of the snail baits spread around.

LILY BORER: These are black caterpillars with yellow band and can cause major damage to Clivia plants. This caterpillar tunnels into the leaves and stem and if left to its own devices will kill the plant. Kill them by squashing by hand or use a systemic stomach pesticide. Other less prevalent pests are aphids, thrips, and red spider mite. Check with your nurseryman on methods to rid your collection of these.

FUNGAL AND BACTERIAL DISEASES: Various diseases occur in clivias such as seed rot, root rot, rust, leaf spot and bacterial rot. We all have had the experience of a young seedling or a semi-mature Clivia plant in our collections "falling over." This problem is usually caused by too wet a potting mix or not enough aeration in the mix. Make sure you have an open mix and watch the watering. Often larger plants can be saved by cutting off the rotting material and dusting with Flowers of Sulphur to dry out the infected plant. If the roots are unaffected by the rot, often the plant will throw new growths. Even the top part of the plant can be planted out after cleaning off the rotted parts. Hopefully it will develop new roots. There are various fungicides like copper sprays, Fongarid and Zineb. Use as directed.

WATERING

Liberal amounts of water should be applied during these months (January, February and March) the main growing season, easing off as the temperatures drop towards autumn. Don't let young seedlings in small pots dry out. Of course, in Toowoomba and a lot of areas in Australia, severe water restrictions are in place. A lot of growers have overcome the problem slightly by installing rainwater tanks. It is marvelous what a cheap electric pump can pump from the tank around the garden!

FEEDING

During these growing months fertilizer should be applied. Be very careful with young seedlings and only use fertilizers like blood and bone, Nitrosol, seaweed fertilizers or half strength Thrive. For the larger plants the "lazy" fertilizer Osmocote (the 6 months one) is recommended. Some growers use a fertilizer such as Tropic (or equal to Tropic), especially on established clivias in the garden pots. During the summer months phosphorus to strengthen growths and potassium should be applied to stimulate flowers,

PLANTING OUT SEEDLINGS

Planting out young seedlings can still be undertaken now, but beware, do not plant out if the weather is hot and humid. Young plants should be planted out when the first leaf is at least 10cm and preferably when a second leaf is on the way. Plant them out in individual small pots or community pots (several plants in the one pot). The potting mix should be similar to the potted adult plants growing medium. Make sure the seedlings are kept under shade of at least 70% and do not over-water. Use fertilizer as above. DO NOT OVERPOT.

POTTING ON

If you have seedlings at least 12 months old and are growing well and look healthy, pot them on to bigger pots. Small chopped up pieces of styrene or beads can be placed in the bottom of the pots to lighten the load and help drainage. Remember not to disturb the roots of the plants too much.

DIVIDING AND TRANSPLANTING

The general opinion is that clivias in warm climates can be divided and repotted any time of the year without detrimental results, but spring and summer are regarded as the best times as they should establish more quickly. Remember if offsets are being removed, handle the plant gently, pulling the roots apart. Don't forget to dust any cut with Flowers of Sulphur to prevent any rotting.

DEAD AND YELOWING LEAVES

Keep your Clivia growing areas free of any dead or yellowing lower leaves from your Clivia plants. These leaves can spread fungal diseases. Remember when handling insecticides and fungicides take precautions and please wear protective gloves and mask.