

# Cymbidium Culture (Sim-bid-ee-um)

Cymbidium Magic  
Carpet 'Gem'



The Cymbidium is commonly known as the King of Orchids and is native to the cool highlands of China and northern Asia. Cymbidiums are valued for their large stems of fragrant flowers found in multitudes of colors which can

The following are the cultural requirements that apply to Cymbidiums grown in the upper Midwest.

## **LIGHT**

To ensure good growth along with profuse flowering, Cymbidium requires bright light throughout the year. They prefer some direct sun and do best with the light source above rather than from the side. A south or west exposure is the recommended house environment.

Cymbidiums do best when grown outdoors during June through October. The ideal location would be to hang them from a tree or the overhang of your house, place them in a sunny screened porch, or tucked in the bushes where they can receive some dappled sunlight or direct morning sun.

Cymbidiums can benefit from higher light intensities as the day length decreases towards fall and into winter, and vice-versa for the spring and summer. Provide as much light as possible for your plant throughout the year without causing sunburn on the leaves. Once your Cymbidium is in the flowering stage, it is best to shade it from any direct sun to prolong the life of the blooms.



Cymbidium King Arthur 'Round Table'  
Photos by Chuck Acker

## **TEMPERATURE**

An important cultural element for Cymbidiums is that they do best when exposed to a 10-to-15-degree differential between day and night temperatures. For that reason, grow Cymbidiums outdoors from June until mid-October. While growing outdoors, these plants do not mind periodic temperature dips into the 30s as long as it does not freeze. It is time to bring your Cymbidium indoors once the temperature consistently nears the freezing mark, either during the day or night. Try to push the threshold of low temperatures as long as possible while outdoors in the fall, but avoid freezing the plant. It is essential to subject your Cymbidium to very cool temperatures to set the bloom spikes.

Once you have brought your Cymbidium indoors for the growing season of October through May, it is best to place them in an area that experiences a cool nighttime temperature of 55 degrees or lower but not below freezing. This lower temperature can be achieved by using a garage window, a basement window or a spare room with a significantly reduced nighttime temperature. The light level can be compromised because it is more crucial to provide cool temperatures than bright light. Continue to grow your Cymbidium in a very chilly area until at least the first of December or until the area experiences close to freezing temperatures. Again, it is imperative to subject your Cymbidium to very cool temperatures to set the bloom spikes.



Cymbidium Pipeta 'Magenta'

When the bloom spikes are set and developing, the Cymbidium still prefers to be in a cool area of no more than 55 degrees at night and 75 degrees or less during the daytime. If the buds turn yellow and die off, either the day or night temperatures were too warm. As your Cymbidium buds develop and begin to open, it is alright to move the plant to an area of your home with more amicable temperatures. Keep in mind that the cooler the temperature, the longer your Cymbidium flowers will stay in bloom.

## **WATER**

Proper indoor watering for Cymbidiums requires allowing the bark mix to become dry just beneath the surface between watering cycles. Factors such as how root-bound your pot is, how much light the plant is receiving and what size pot, will all play a role in how fast it dries out. Typically, while growing indoors, a good thorough watering once a week should be sufficient. In flowering or very root-bound plants, watering every 4-5 days is needed. When watering, drench the bark thoroughly until water runs freely from the bottom of the pot. Remove pot from any decorative container to allow for proper drainage. Never let your Cymbidium to stand in water, as this will cause root rot. Never use softened water on any of your orchids.

For outdoor growing, it is best to maintain slightly more moisture than for indoors. During the highest temperature periods (mid-summer), keep the Cymbidium moist but not soggy. A watering two to three times a week is usually needed during that period. As the temperature begins to drop towards the end of the outdoor season, start letting the bark become dry beneath the surface, much like the indoor watering schedule. While outdoors, the natural rain on the plant is highly beneficial.

## **FERTILIZER**

Cymbidiums grow principally between February-July and need the fertilizer of 30-10-10. Dilute 1 tsp. per gallon of water and apply every second to third watering. Start using Blossom Booster 10-30-20 in August, mixed and applied as above. Continue the blossom booster until spikes are apparent or into January.

**Note:** Mix your fertilizer ahead and store it in a plastic container that can be labeled and capped (such as a used gallon milk jug). This ensures the solution is thoroughly diluted, at room temperature, and convenient to use.

## **HUMIDITY**

Since Cymbidiums are cool growing orchids native to high elevations, they are not so particular regarding humidity needs. While growing outdoors, they receive ample humidity in the Midwest summer climate. When growing indoors during the heating season, it would be beneficial to provide added humidity by placing the plant on a humidity tray, misting the leaves in the morning, or grouping the Cymbidium near other plants.



Cymbidium Via Ambarino 'Golden Harvest' AM/AOS



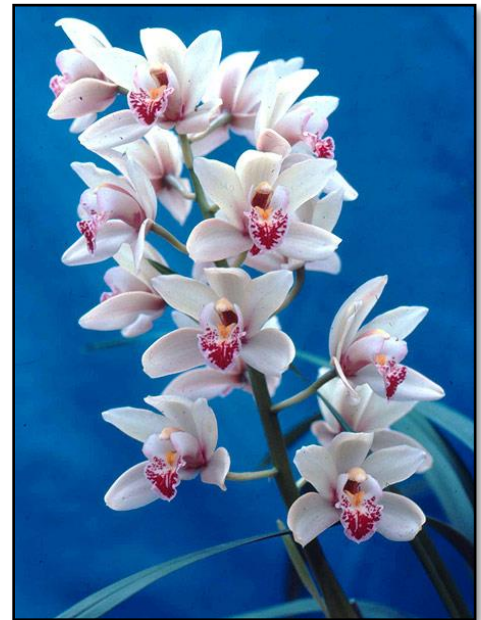
## **BLOOMS**

Cymbidiums can bloom up to 3 months. When the flowers are finished blooming, cut the stem off at the point where it had emerged from the plant.

## **REPOTTING**

Cymbidiums should be repotted every two to three years. If you are not experienced or comfortable doing this yourself, call upon someone you know who can help you through the process. A recently purchased Cymbidium may be ready for repotting as soon as it has finished flowering. Inquire with the seller as to when your specific plant was last repotted. It is best to repot Cymbidiums after flowering is completed in the spring or early summer.

Cymbidiums may be divided if the plant has enough pseudobulbs to do so safely. A division should consist of a minimum of four pseudobulbs, all having leaves. This will ensure that the plant will have enough strength for future growth. Larger divisions of 6-10 pseudobulbs are preferred,

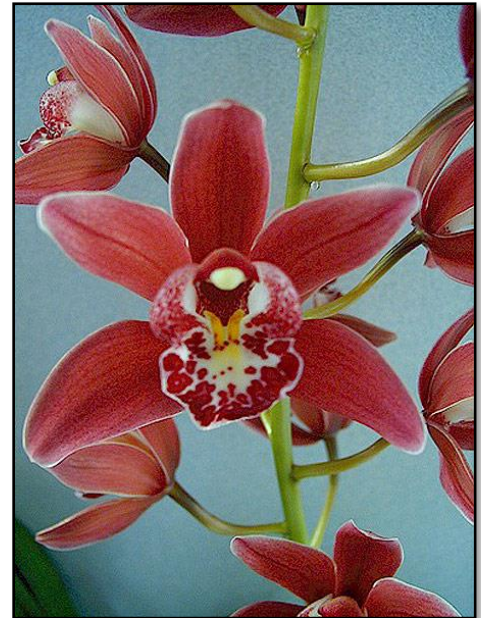


Cymbidium Leodogran 'Snowy'

which will make for a specimen plant the next blooming season. If your plant is not dividable at this time, simply repot it into a larger pot.

To make a proper division, begin by examining your plant for a natural line between the pseudobulbs that will give you equal halves if possible. Using a large stiff knife, cut through the plant and root mass to divide it. Try to keep the root mass intact as much as possible, which will prevent transplant shock. Some leaf-less pseudobulbs can be removed and discarded at this time.

**A note about orchid viruses:** most commonly, the transmission of orchid viruses is caused by using the same cutting tool on multiple plants. The most effective method to reduce virus transmission from plant to plant is to briefly flame-sterilize your cutting tools between each plant. A simple Butane torch or a gas stove are handy items for this purpose. This practice should be implemented when repotting as well as when cutting off perished flowering stems.



Cymbidium Leodogran 'Holiday'

Once your division is made, select a new pot in the appropriate size to allow for another two years of growth. Unfortunately, there is no set rule for choosing the proper pot size, but generally, increase the pot size by one to two inches around the root ball. Do not use too large of a pot because these plants like to be somewhat crowded, even after repotting. The Cymbidium prefers to be potted into clay pots for the benefit of the clay's porosity and the stability from the weight.

Place the plant into your selected pot and add our moistened fir bark orchid potting mix around the roots. Position the plant in the container so the junction of the plant and roots is buried one-half inch below the potting mixture. Pack the potting mix firmly with a blunt tool to ensure the plant is secure in the pot. Wait about one week and then water thoroughly.

Chuck Acker

Good Luck and Happy Growing!