

Cattleya Culture

(Kat-lee-a)

by Chuck Acker

Cattleyas are some of the most commonly grown orchid plants. The flowers of Cattleyas and their related hybrids come in most colors of the spectrum. Like most other cultivated orchids, Cattleyas are epiphytic or air plants. Because they are epiphytic, they have developed water-storing organs called pseudobulbs and have large, fleshy roots covered with a spongy, water-retentive velamen. They are accustomed to being dry at the roots between watering, therefore should be potted in a very porous, free-draining medium such as a fir bark type orchid mix.



LIGHT: To attain good growth and flower production, Cattleyas need bright light. They can tolerate some direct sun and prefer the light coming from above rather than the side of the plant. In the home, a south or west exposure is recommended. Cattleyas can benefit from higher intensities of light as day length decreases and vice-versa. Cattleyas are photoperiodic (day length sensitive) so it is very important that they receive no additional light past the normal days length. Except when you are enjoying its blooms, be watchful of the hours of additional light it receives. Also, to prolong blooming, shade from direct sun. Cattleya flowers last an average of 3 to 6 weeks. After the flower has expired remove at point where it comes out of the leaf.

TEMPERATURE: Recommended temps are 55° - 60° at night and 70° - 85° during the day. Seedlings should have night temperatures 5° to 10° higher. A 10 - 20 degree differential between day and night is recommended, especially for mature plants. Higher day temps can be tolerated (up to 95°), if humidity, air circulation and shading are increased.

HUMIDITY: 50% - 80% humidity is recommended. This can be achieved in the home by grouping plants together and/or placing them on Humidity Trays. Misting plants is also beneficial. Mist in the morning only.

WATER: Take your plant to a sink, water thoroughly (water runs freely from the pot), drain well. **NEVER ALLOW THE POT TO STAND IN WATER!** Cattleyas need to dry out



between watering. During sunny, warm conditions water every 5 to 6 days. Under damp and dark conditions 7 to 12 days. Take into consideration that the frequency of watering during any conditions is dictated by pot size, temperature and also how root-bound your plant is.

FERTILIZER: Cattleya and their relatives are active growers. Fertilizer is essential for good growth and flowering. We recommend to use a 30-10-10 formula applied every other time you water for three applications, then for the fourth application use a high phosphorus Blossom Booster 10-30-20. This combination ensures your plant good growth with maximum bloom potential. Dilute 1 tsp. to a gallon of water. * Remember: Water - Feed - Water - Feed!!

Note: Mix your fertilizer ahead and store 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 temp. and is convenient to use.

REPOTTING: Done approx. every 2 years. When the rhizome of the plant protrudes over the edge of the pot or when the potting medium starts to break down and drain poorly are good indicators of the need to repot. It is best to repot just as new roots sprout from the rhizome, after flowering or in the spring. Until a plant has six mature pseudobulbs, it should be put in a larger pot and not divided. If dividing a plant, keep 3 to 5 bulbs per division and select a pot that will allow for 2 years of growth. Place the cut side of the plant against the pot and fill with moistened fir bark type orchid mix keeping rhizome 1/2" below medium. Pack firmly and stake if necessary. Keep plant shaded and relatively dry at the roots while misting frequently for 2 to 3 weeks - this promotes new root growth.



OUTDOOR GROWING: When Cattleyas are grown in the home it is recommended that they are summered outdoors. Care must be taken to protect plants from direct mid-day sun. A loosely-leaved tree or patio overhang provides the correct light. In the Midwest, Cattleyas usually can stay out until early October.