

# ORCHIDS, CYMBIDIUM ORCHID CARE

These orchids are prized for their sprays of large flowers, used especially as cut flowers or for corsages in the springtime. There are two main types of cymbidiums – standards and miniatures. Where summers are warm (above 90°), only miniatures are recommended, since they are more heat-tolerant and bloom in warmer weather.

Unlike many cultivated orchids, cymbidiums are semi-terrestrial plants. They have a growth period in the summer, needing a temperature range of 60° to 85° F, medium to high light, ample fertilizer, and a moist potting medium. Cool fall nights (to 40°), “bloom booster” fertilizer, or no fertilizer ALL induce flowering. They should be planted in fir bark/peat moss. Miniature cymbidiums can stand temperatures 5°-10° higher.

**Temperature** is the most critical factor in blooming cymbidiums of either type. During the summer, standard cymbidiums are usually grown outside in semi-shade, where day temperatures should be 75° to 85°(or more), but night temperatures in the late summer to fall (August to October) must be 50° to 60° to initiate flower spikes. Optimum temperatures in winter are 45° to 55° at night and 65° to 75° during the day. When in bud, temperatures must be as constant as possible, between 55° and 75°. Miniatures can stand temperatures 5° to 10° higher than standards and still bloom well. Most cymbidiums can stand light frosts and survive, but it is not recommended. Bring them inside when temperatures dip to 40°; In mild climates they may be grown outside year round. A bright and cool location inside is best for winter months.

**Light** is also very important for growing cymbidiums. Coming from cool and bright areas in Asia, they need high light but cool temperatures. In many of our climates, the high level of light cymbidiums need is accompanied by high temperatures in the summer, which may cause the plants not to bloom. There are several ways of counteracting this: spray the plants with water during summer afternoons to cool the plants down, shade more heavily, and increase air movement. The maximum amount of light possible, short of burning, should be given to the plants. This means only light shade during the middle of the day, or about 20% shade. In cool areas (e.g. coastal California), full sun is tolerated. Leaves should be a medium to golden green in color, not dark green. Keep shadier in the winter, especially if in bud.

**Water** must be provided at all times to cymbidiums. As semi-terrestrials, they need a fairly constant supply of moisture. Since they produce all their vegetative growth during the spring and summer months, they need the most water then. Water heavily during the growth season, keeping the potting medium from drying out completely, and reduce water when the pseudobulbs are completed in late summer. Keep barely moist during the winter.

(over)

**Humidity** outdoors is usually sufficient during the summer months, except in dry climates.

There, evaporative cooling in a greenhouse, or misting outside, is necessary.

Keep humidity at 40% to 60% during the winter, especially if plants are in bud. Keep the air moving to prevent fungus spotting (*Botrytis*) from damaging the flowers.

**Fertilizing** at the proper time will help cymbidiums bloom. During the growth season (spring through late summer), high-nitrogen fertilizer (like 30-10-10) is used. In late summer, use a high phosphorus, bloom booster fertilizer (like 10-30-20), to help form bloom spikes. Fertilize at full strength every week to two weeks. In winter, fertilize only once a month.

**Potting** must be done about every two years, as the potting medium breaks down, usually in the spring after blooming. Shake all the old potting mix off the roots, dividing the plant if desired. Divisions of green bulbs with leaves must have 3 to 4 bulbs minimum to bloom; bulbs

without leaves are considered backbulbs, and need special care to grow (see below). Pick a potting mix that will hold moisture well; a medium-grade fir bark with peat moss and perlite is a common mix. Select a pot that will allow for at least 2 to 3 years of pseudobulb growth before crowding the pot, while planning on placing the active growing bulb(s) of the division farthest from the side of the pot. Spread the roots over a cone of the mix in the bottom of the pot, and fill the pot with medium, working it among the roots, tamping firmly. The junction of roots and pseudobulbs should be about ½" to 1" below the top of the mix. Keep shaded, drier at roots but humid, until new roots grow.

**Backbulbs** may be left on the division to add strength, or removed to propagate. Take single backbulbs, and bury halfway in a bark or peat/sand mix. Keep shaded and warm until new growth sprouts, and pot as above. It may take up to three years to produce a blooming-size plant from this method.

### **In Summary**

#### Temperature

Cymbidiums must have cool nights, especially in fall, to encourage flowering.

Cymbidiums can stand hot summer days up to 95° if shading, humidity, and air circulation are increased.

GIVE:

Nights of 45° to 60° F

Days of 65° to 85° F

#### Light

Strong summer sun is important. Needs bright indirect light in winter.

GIVE:

Summer – ½ filtered to full sun (in cool climates)

Winter – Bright window in home or in greenhouse.

#### Water

Spray with water when plants are outside to keep them cool. Mist in home in A.M. to raise humidity. Avoid misting flowers.

GIVE:

Summer – water copiously enough to keep moist.

Winter – water just to keep from drying leaves.

#### Fertilizer

Must be provided on a regular basis since potting media have little.

GIVE:

Summer – 30-10-10 once a week at recommended rates.

Early fall – use 10-30-20 bloom booster until flower spikes appear.

Winter – use balanced fertilizer once a month.