CYMBIDIUM Orchids

Pronounced: sim-BID-ee-um

Cymbidiums are large, grassy plants, with even the miniature varieties being 60 cm or more in height. Amongst the best known of orchids because of their popularity as cut flowers, they are not the easiest to grow in many areas of Canada, because of their light and temperature requirements. Adherence to their required cultural conditions will, however, yield a tremendous show of stems of large, long-lasting, white, green, yellow, orange, red or brown flowers in autumn, winter or spring.

Healthy Cymbidiums start with healthy roots:

- ☐ Pot in a fine medium. Fir bark mixtures are best, with 0.5 to 1.0 cm chunks of bark, perlite and charcoal. Some slow release fertilizer pellets may be added.
- ☐ Repot when the growth has reached the edge of the pot and new growths are just starting to form.
- ☐ Remove old medium if it is loose and any rotting roots; choose a plastic pot just big enough to hold two successive new growths, and position the plant so that these new growths will grow towards the edge of the pot.
- ☐ Roots should be moist at all times when the plant is in active growth but should dry out somewhat as the growth matures and when the plant is not actively growing.
- ☐ When watering, water thoroughly, with a volume of water at least equal to that of the pot.
- ☐ Do not use water softened in salt-consuming water softeners. Low mineral water is preferred, such as naturally soft water or rain water. If hard water is used, water very heavily to flush minerals.
- ☐ Fertilize frequently with a balanced fertilizer. One-quarter to one-half strength recommended by manufacturer for house plants while in active growth (typically spring and summer), and not at all when dormant (typically fall and winter).

Healthy leaves produce more and bigger flowers:

- ☐ High to very high light levels are appropriate. Leaves should be a light green, not yellowish (too much light) or dark green (too little light). They should be somewhat stiff, not long and floppy (more light needed).
- ☐ Full sunshine on a windowsill (South) or under HID sodium or metal halide lamps. Because of the size of the plants and the high light requirement culture under fluorescent lights is not likely to be successful.
- ☐ Cymbidiums do best with 50-60% humidity but will grow and bloom at somewhat lower humidity levels. Use humidifier to raise humidity – humidity pans and misting minimally effective. Enclosing plant growing areas is effective but ensure fresh air and air movement to avoid mold and rot.
- ☐ Cymbidiums will grow in cool or intermediate temperatures; however, almost all require a period of 8-12 weeks of 5°C to 10°C nights in August to October to set flower spikes. If you cannot provide these temperatures some species (including *finlaysonianum* and *aloifolium*), and miniature hybrids are warm growing but typically are not as showy as the cooler growing varieties.
- ☐ Cymbidiums are particularly prone to attack by spider mite. Watch carefully for infestations, and treat early with insecticidal soap or neem oil.

Cymbidiums usually bloom once a year and the flowers last for four or more weeks:

- ☐ Maintain plant orientation while spikes are growing for best display. Some miniature Cymbidiums have naturally cascading sprays. All other Cymbidiums should be carefully staked as spike is growing to ensure best display.
- ☐ Cymbidiums often provide much superior flower size and color as mature plants than as first bloom seedlings.
- ☐ Buds turning yellow, wilting and falling prior to opening is from not enough energy in the plant to open the flower either because the light is too dim, the plant is too small, or the roots have rotted. Also caused by ethylene gas (from ripening fruit) or drastic temperature changes.

Space prevents more detail here. The general “Orchid Culture” sheets in this series, available from your society or on the web at http://www.canadianorchidcongress.ca/ provide further cultural information. For specific help with your orchids or further information join your local orchid society.

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