LYCASTE

Pronounced: lie-KAS-tee

Many Lycaste are amongst the leviathans of the orchid world when grown in the right conditions. Leaves can be one meter in length, with goose egg sized pseudobulbs. Their beauty lies in the abundant and often very large waxy flowers of a triangular geometry that cluster around the pseudobulbs. The white, green, yellow, brown, pink or red flowers bloom all at once.

Healthy Lycaste 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. Add moss if watering frequency cannot maintain required level of moisture. In larger pots use larger mix (1.5 – 2.0 cm) in all but top 10 cm of pot.
- ☐ Repot annually in the spring when the new growth is approximately the height of the previous year's pseudobulbs.
- ☐ Remove old medium if it is loose or breaking down, rotting roots or brown bulbs; use a plastic pot that will be full when new growth matures.
- ☐ When the plant is actively growing, keep medium constantly moist. When lowest sheathing leaves on new growth turn yellow, signaling dormancy, stop watering until pseudobulbs shrivel slightly. Then water only enough to keep pseudobulbs from shriveling further until new growth in spring. Some bloom in autumn, if so, continue to water until blooming complete. 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 content water is preferred, such as naturally soft water or rain water. If hard water is used, water very heavily to flush minerals.
- ☐ Fertilize weakly and frequently with a balanced fertilizer during growth. One-eighth to one-quarter strength recommended by manufacturer for house plants every week. Do not fertilize when dormant.

Healthy leaves produce more and bigger flowers:

- ☐ 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 firm, not long and floppy (more light needed). A slight red blush indicates an ideal light level on some plants. A more pronounced red blush indicates too much light.
- ☐ Four hours of sunshine on a windowsill (West or South) or 15-30 cm under an eight tube fluorescent fixture or under an HID sodium or metal halide lamp. Plant size usually prevents mature plants growing under fluorescent lights.
- ☐ Be careful of rot – the large pseudobulbs are almost entirely water – black spot on pseudobulb likely water blister. Avoid standing water at night; treat with the spice cinnamon.
- ☐ Delicate leaves are prone to spider mites – wash off leaves regularly.
- ☐ Lycaste do best with 50-60% humidity but when mature will grow and bloom, although more slowly, in lower humidity. 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.
- ☐ Grow Lycaste in cool to intermediate temperatures with 10°C minimum winter nights and 29°C summer day maximum. Ensure 6-12°C day/night difference to aid flower formation.
- ☐ Two major groups of Lycaste:
  - *aromatica* type : deciduous, usually yellow, green, brown flowers, higher light, intermediate temperatures. *aromatica* itself deciduous in spring, but sheathing leaves turn yellow in autumn.
  - *skinneri* type: leaves last 2-3 years, whites, pinks, reds, lower light, cool temperatures, coarser media.
- ☐ *Ida* and *Anguloa* are related, often very large, with flowers resembling tulips. Grow as for *skinneri* but with more light.

Lycaste usually bloom annually and the flowers individually last for up to two weeks:

- ☐ Maintain plant orientation while spikes are growing for best display.
- ☐ Buds turning yellow, wilting and falling prior to opening is from not enough energy in the plant to open the flower often because of high temperatures or dry air.
- ☐ Treat buds and flowers with care, as they bruise at the slightest touch.

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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