MILTONIOPSIS: The Pansy Orchid

Pronounced: mil-toh-nee-OP-sis

Producing sprays of large, flat, pleasantly fragrant flowers in shades of pink, white, yellow and red in the spring and autumn, these plants are well worth the modest extra effort required to ensure they grow well. Some have contrasting patterns resembling water falls on their lips. These plants are often referred to by the name Miltonia, but are correctly called Miltoniopsis.

Healthy Miltoniopsis 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.
- ☐ Repot annually, preferably in the autumn, to ensure good root growth. Miltoniopsis produce large numbers of roots, but only when grown in fresh medium.
- ☐ Remove old medium if it is loose and any rotting roots; choose a plastic pot just big enough to hold the roots, and position the plant in the center of the pot.
- ☐ Roots should be moist at all times. The ideal situation is that the plant is watered each morning, and has dried to dampness by evening. Miltoniopsis should be grown in small pots for the plant size, to promote this rapid drying cycle.
- ☐ 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 weakly and frequently with a balanced fertilizer. One-eighth to one-quarter strength recommended by manufacturer for house plants every week in spring and summer and every two weeks in autumn and winter.

Healthy leaves produce more and bigger flowers:

- ☐ Medium 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). A slight red blush indicates an ideal light level on some plants. A more pronounced red blush indicates too much light.
- ☐ Two to three hours of sunshine on a windowsill (East or West) or 15-30 cm under a four tube fluorescent fixture.
- ☐ Miltoniopsis do best with 60-70% humidity but will grow and bloom at somewhat lower humidity levels. Use humidifier to raise humidity – humidity pans and misting rarely effective. Enclosing plant growing areas is effective but ensure fresh air and air movement to avoid mold and rot.
- ☐ Miltoniopsis are prone to accordion pleating of the leaves and having difficulty opening their flowers, with the lip getting caught wrapped around the column. These are usually symptoms of low humidity or not enough water at the roots. Check the roots for moisture level before increasing watering, to avoid causing rot.
- ☐ Grow Miltoniopsis in intermediate temperatures with 14°C minimum winter nights and a maximum of 26°C summer days. Ensure 6-12°C day/night difference to aid flower formation. Miltoniopsis are stressed by high temperatures, so observe the 26°C maximum carefully.
- ☐ Miltoniopsis are particularly prone to attack by spider mite. Watch carefully for infestations, and treat early with insecticidal soap or neem oil.

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

- ☐ Maintain plant orientation while spike is growing for best display.
- ☐ Miltoniopsis 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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