

Cattleya

The Corsage Orchid

General Information:

Cattleyas are among the most commonly grown orchids, and their culture is often used as the basis for comparison with other types of orchids. Like most other cultivated orchids, cattleyas are epiphytes, or air plants. They have well-developed water-storage organs (called pseudobulbs) and large, fleshy roots. They should be potted in a porous, free-draining medium. The most commonly used are fir bark, shredded tree-fern fiber, various types of rock, processed coconut fiber and lately, mixes based on peat moss and perlite. Keep out of cold, dry air while in bloom.

Light:

Sufficient light is important for healthy growth and flower production. Provide bright light, some sun. In the home, an east, west or curtain filtered south window. Under lights, four 40 watt incandescent bulbs directly over plants. Plants should be naturally erect, without need of much staking, and of a medium olive-green color. Dark green, limp foliage indicates too little light. Three to five hours of direct sun is needed.

Temperature:

Mature plants need a 15 to 20°F difference between night and day. Provide nights of 55 to 60°F; days of 70 to 85°F. Cattleyas can tolerate temperatures up to 95 to 100°F if shading, humidity and air circulation are increased.

Water:

Mature plants must dry out between waterings. Root and crown rot (blackened leaves) is a case of over watering.

Humidity:

Cattleyas need 50 to 60 percent. In the home, place on trays over moistened pebbles.

Fertilizer:

Fertilizer must be provided on a regular basis because most potting media have little. The exact fertilizer you use will depend on the mix in which your plant is growing. A good general rule is to use an orchid food (30-10-10 or similar ratio) fertilizer “weakly, weekly.” That is, fertilize every week at one quarter to one half of the recommended dilution.

Potting:

Should be done every two to three years in spring before the mix loses consistency. Pot firmly in media that has good aeration and ample drainage, allowing enough room for two years' growth.