

Odontoglossum Orchid

General Information:

These New World Tropics, high altitude orchids are popular where cool temperatures prevail. The Colombian miltonias and showy odontoglossums have striking sprays of flowers. Culture is similar for hybrids in this group, some being Odontonia, Odontioda, and Vuylstekeara.

Light:

Light levels should be part sun, part shade. An east or west window or a filtered south window in the home is ideal: One to three hours of direct sun is needed for bud development.

Temperature:

Temperature is critical for these plants; day temperatures below 75° to 80°F are preferred year-round. Night temperatures of 55° to 60°F are best. Short periods of warmer day temperatures may be tolerated, especially if humidity and air movement are at optimal levels and nights are cool. Miltoniopsis plants prefer night temperatures at the upper end of the range while many odontoglossums thrive at 50° to 55°F at night.

Water:

Water should be plentiful, coupled with perfect drainage. The potting medium should just start to dry before watering again. “Accordion-pleating” on miltonia leaves is a symptom of insufficient water or humidity, and may appear on plants of other genera if severe. This may mean watering every two to seven days, depending on weather, pot size and material, and type of potting medium.

Humidity:

Humidity, ideally 40% to 80%, is important for all these orchids, coupled with moving air. In the home, set the plants on trays above moist pebbles. Misting is beneficial, but in the mornings only.

Fertilizer:

Fertilizer should be applied regularly while plants are actively growing. Applications of 30-10-10 formulations twice a month are ideal for plants in a bark-based potting medium. A 20-20-20 formulation should be used on other media. If weather is cloudy, applications once a month are sufficient.

Repotting:

Repot as new growth emerges from the base of the plant, which is usually in the spring or fall. These orchids like to be very pot-bound, so when repotting leave only enough room for one to two years of new growth. A fine-grade potting medium with excellent drainage is required; since the medium is kept moist, annual or bi-annual repotting is normal. Usually the lowest one-quarter to one-third of the pot is filled with drainage material, either pottery shards, rocks or styrofoam “peanuts”. Spread the roots over a cone of potting medium and fill in around the roots with potting soil. Firm the potting soil well around the roots by applying pressure. Keep humidity high and the pot dry until new roots form. A vitamin B1 compound may help establish newly potted plants. (Plant starter)