

AUSTRALIAN NATIVE ORCHIDS

The many hundreds of different species of orchids native to Australia can be classified into two main groups - the terrestrials which grow in the soil and the epiphytes which attach themselves to trees and rocks.

The most extensively grown of the groups are the epiphytes, however the formation of a Victorian branch of the Australian Native Orchid Society has encouraged the cultivation of the terrestrials. There are many potting mixtures suitable for the epiphyte group, pine bark, either alone or with the addition of charcoal and small pieces of stone. Another method of culture suitable for the smaller genera is to mount the plants on tree fern blocks, cork or wood, using wire, nylon thread or similar.



Any liquid animal manure or fertilisers are beneficial to these orchids, if applied during the period of vigorous growth, best results will be obtained if the fertilisers are used at no more than half the recommended strength, and a regular programme is adopted.

Provided the drainage of the containers is good, regular watering is necessary in the summer season (say every two or three days in hot weather). In winter, water should be applied sparingly with just sufficient to keep plants in good condition.

At all times of the year the damping down of floors and benches is essential to maintain a constant level of relative humidity as the majority of epiphyte orchids grow naturally in areas where the climate is generally described as humid - epiphyte orchids derive much of their moisture requirements from the atmosphere.

The production of flower spikes usually occurs in spring or early summer, when the spikes are visible the moisture requirement of the plants will need to be increased. The fertilising program may also be continued at this time.

The following are a few of the species that are being grown successfully in Victoria without heat: *Dendrobium speciosum*, *Dendrobium kingium*, *Dendrobium falcorostrum*, *Dendrobium beckleri*, *Dendrobium linguiforme*, *Dendrobium gracilicaule*, *Dendrobium aemulum*, *Dendrobium delicatum*, *Dendrobium gracillimum* are only a few that can be easily grown and obtained.



Also *Sarcochilus hartmannii*, *Sarcochilus fitzgeraldii* and *Sarcochilus falcatus* may be considered among the gems of Australian Orchids, but they require much more shade than the *Dendrobiums*, and need more frequent watering as they do not have pseudo-bulbs.

Many hundreds of hybrids of Australian native orchids have been bred in recent years, the success of these hybrids will no doubt continue to encourage further breeding. In particular the wonderfully blooming tropical orchids have been hybridized with cooler growing ones to produce a wider range of orchids suitable for temperate climates like Melbourne.

There are many more species and hybrids from Northern Australia, that require additional heat in winter in order to prosper and produce flowers.

Australian native orchids offer all growers the opportunity to produce flowers of great beauty and botanical interest. Many have a delightful perfume.