



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Seasonal Tips for Cymbidiums
Snails, Repotting and Fertilizing Cymbidiums
May and June

by Harry McElroy, cymbidiuman@msn.com

Bush Snails. This time of year, I like to explore my greenhouse and look at the many new growths on cattleyas. This is also a good time to look for Bush Snails that can often be found on the new growths. This tiny little snail is responsible for more undetected damage to collections than most people realize. They eat the root tips and often damage the new growths. A good way to detect this pest is to place a piece of apple, potato or lettuce on top of the pot as bait. Leave it for a day or two then go to the plant at night in the dark with a flashlight, lift the piece of bait you put on the pot and look for the tiny little black Snails underneath. If you find them, use a bait or poison to get rid of them. Dead Line is a good one but be careful not to poison birds or pets with whatever you use. In small collections, you can bait the snails with apple, potato or lettuce and squash them till there are no more.

Repotting. Plants that need it, should be repotted at this time of year.

- ★ *Dry Cymbidiums Before Repotting.* Have you ever struggled through repotting of a large cymbidium, where you feel like a hack saw might be the best tool to separate all those roots? Let the big specimen plants get very dry before dividing them. Having the plant dry before repotting is counter to what we do with just about every other kind of orchid, where we water before repotting to soften the roots and make them more pliable. The cymbidium roots shrink when they are dry and come apart very easily. When the roots are wet, they swell and are hard to pull apart.
- ★ *Pot Selection.* Cymbidiums should never be dry so I have been placing my plants in shallow saucers for years. It also helps the stalite stay slightly moist. In lieu of a saucer I plug the bottom holes of the rootmaker pots with silicone caulk to make a small reservoir in the bottom and then place masking tape over the bottom holes to help keep the caulk in place. The pots have drainage holes on every step down. This eliminates the need for a saucer and is less likely to harbor mosquitos
- ★ *Repotting Media.* The potting media of choice is stalite. I top dress with diatomite (worked in to the top layer of stalite) to help keep the top layer moist, granular lime and seashell, a sprinkling of crushed tree fern, controlled release fertilizer (Scots 90 day Suncote 16-9-12 with a small addition of 90 day calcium nitrate) and a few granuals of deadline - the blue pellets. It is almost impossible to overwater the plants potted that way - they do well outside even during heavy rain.

Fertilizing Cymbidiums

- ★ *Cymbidiums with the Exception of devonianum and Its Primary Hybrids.* The plants are growing fast now and fertilizer is a must. Use a good Cal Mag fertilizer (containing Calcium and Magnesium). I use 12-3-15-7-2 from Jacks but anything that has about the same ratios is ok. My mix for cymbidiums is 125 ppm N. I also



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top dress with a 50/50 mix of crushed seashell and granular dolomite lime at the rate of one tablespoon/ gal pot and a table spoon of 15-8-11 360 day controlled release fertilizer which has all micronutrients in it. Cymbidiums are heavy feeders and the fertilizer regiment insures that the plants get enough. The lime stabilizes pH but does not provide much calcium unless conditions become acid within the pot or water supply. Its best benefit is that it keeps pH at 7 or slightly less. If lime is not used roots will rot. Using lime allows me to grow my cymbidiums in a pan of water 1 to 1 1/2 deep without root rot.

- ★ *Fertilizing devonianum and Its Primary Hybrids.* Fertilize these at half the rate of the rest. This cymbidium is an epiphyte and does not require as much fertilizer. At this time I am using at least half tablespoon of the 360 day controlled release fertilizer. If you are find that the leaves die from the tip back, you should reduce fertilizer further.
- ★ *Fertilizing Pendulous Cymbidiums:* Be careful with all the pendulous cymbidiums and watch for tip browning. I have not grown this type for very long and have not established hard rules for fertilizer.