

JOS Cymbidium Culture Sheet

by K. Harry McElroy
(pronounced sym-BID-ee-um)



These orchids are prized for their long-lasting sprays of flowers, used especially as cut flowers or for corsages in the spring. There are two main types of cymbidiums - standards and miniatures. In warm climates cymbidiums should be chosen which are warm or heat tolerant. Size of plant growth has nothing to do with heat tolerant selection. Look for plants with the following species in their genetic makeup. *Cym ensifolium* subsp *nematodes*, *cym canaliculatum*, *cym aloifolium*, *Cym finlaysonianum*, *Cym dayanum*, *cym ensifolium* subsp *ensifolium*, *Cym madidum*, *cym madidum*, *Cym suave*, *Cym sinense*, and *Cym pumilum*(*floribundum*)(*pumilum*) listed in the order which they give progeny the most to least heat tolerance. Some species which are rarely used have been left off the list. Size of plant habit has nothing to do with heat tolerance. *Madidium* for example has tremendous heat tolerance but the bulbs are as large as footballs. The plants can be huge.

Light is important for growing cymbidiums. Coming from cool and bright areas in Asia, they need high light but cool temperatures. In many southern climates, high summer temperatures, especially at night, may prevent the plants from blooming. The maximum amount of light possible, short of burning, should be given to the plants. This means only light shade during the middle of the day, or about 20 percent shade. In cool areas (such as coastal California) or (in cooler months), full sun is tolerated. Leaves should be a medium to golden green in color, not dark green.

Temperatures For Cool growing cymbidiums are a critical factor in flowering. During the summer, cymbidiums are usually grown outside in semishade, where day temperatures in summer are 45 to 55 F at night and 65 to 75 F during the day. **Cold growing cymbidiums rarely flower without these temperature conditions and should be avoided in warmer climates.**

Warm Growing Cymbidiums:

Summer temperature can be much warmer and variation between day and night temperatures are not as important. Hybrids made with the above listed species should flower with little concern about temperature ranges. Keep outside but avoid freezing.

Water to provide a constant supply of moisture to cymbidiums, which are semiterrestrial plants. They generally produce all their vegetative growth during the spring and summer and need the most water during that period. Water heavily during the growth season, keeping the potting material evenly moist. Reduce water when the pseudobulbs complete growing in late summer. Keep barely moist during the winter.

Humidity outdoors is usually sufficient during the summer, except in dry climates, where evaporative cooling in a greenhouse is necessary. Keep humidity at 40 to 60

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percent during the winter, especially if plants are in bud. Keep the air moving to prevent Bud drop or fungus (Botrytis) from spotting the flowers.

Fertilize properly to help cymbidiums flower. During the growth season (spring and summer), high nitrogen fertilizer (such as 30-10-10) is used (100 ppm N) or a teaspoon/ Gallon of water. In the fall Septembere and october (use high potassium fertilizer (such as 4-18-38) at (100 ppm K) or 1 teaspoon/ gal of water to help form bloom spikes. Fertilize at every week to two weeks depending on how fast the plant is growing. If cymbidiums are fertilized to heavily too much vegetative growth will occur and they may not flower. Fertilizers used for cymbidiums should provide a source of calcium and magnesium. No fertilizer is needed during the winter months when the plant are not growing.

Potting is usually done in the spring after flowering, usually every two years or when the potting medium decomposes. Shake all of the old potting mix off the roots, dividing the plant if desired. Pick a potting mix that wets quickly but drains excess water very quickly; medium-grade fir bark with peat moss and perlite is a common mix. Select a pot that will allow for at least two to three years of growth before crowding the pot, while planning on placing the active growing pseudobulb(s) of the division farthest from the side of the pot. Spread the roots over a cone of the mix in the bottom of the pot and fill the container with medium, working it among the roots, tamping firmly. Single backbulbs need not even be placed in mix until new growth and roots are noted. Keep shaded and warm until new growth sprouts, and pot as above.

Notes:

Root bound cymbidiums are the most difficult orchids to divide and repot. I recommend the following;

Dry out the root bound cymbidium completely before repotting. Up to 2 weeks without water.

Cut the bottom ½ part of the root ball off with a sterile serrated bread knife.

Divide as required. Three growths and a back bulb are the minimum recommended to give the plant enough vigor to recover quickly. Dry roots separate easily but wet roots are very difficult to separate without severe injury.

Most mixes work as described above but in wet rainy areas the media should drain well and quickly but maintain moisture.