



November 2020 Sunset Valley Orchids Catasetinae Growing Tips

What a great year! Feedback from Catasetinae growers across the country has confirmed that this was a spectacular growing and flowering season.

Now that winter has clearly arrived, your *Catasetums* should have matured growths and be mostly done flowering, *Cycnoches* will be finishing their blooming, *Mormodes* should be flowering now, and *Clowesia* should be starting soon.

Those of you in Florida and southern states already have dormant plants. Those in other areas like here in California should be seeing good signals indicating the start of dormancy, with the lower leaves starting to turn yellow and brown before they drop off.



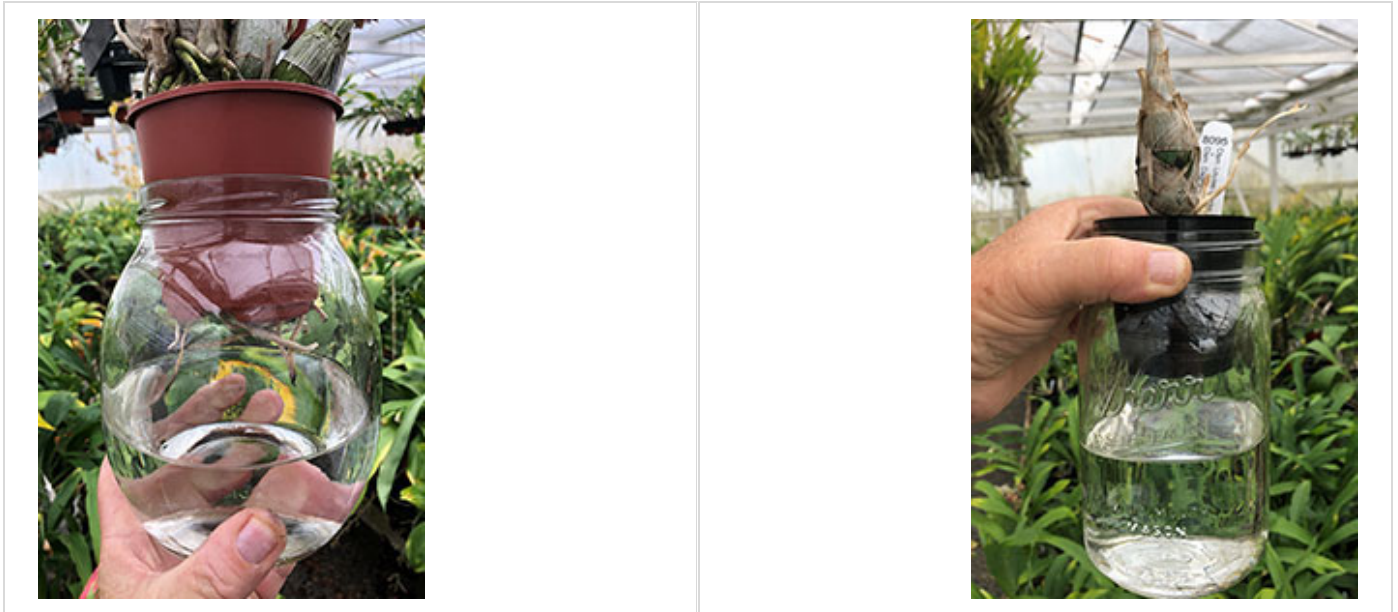
These four plants demonstrate the first stages of dormancy, from left to right: 1) no signs, 2) slight leaf tip yellowing, 3) obvious yellowing and beginning of leaf tip die back, 4) several yellow leaves and tip die back clearly evident.

Leaf yellowing and drop signal the beginning of dormancy. This is when you stop fertilizing and cut back on watering frequency, simulating the end of the wet season in nature. This change in culture will cause the pseudobulbs to harden off in preparation for the upcoming months of dormancy. When most leaves are yellow/brown and have fallen off, cease watering altogether. This marks the start of the dormant period.

Interestingly, not all plants enter dormancy on the same schedule, and it is not uncommon to have plants in several stages of dormancy at the same time. As plants progress toward their dormant period, I segregate some of my most important Catasetinae into groups at similar stages of leaf loss. Grouping plants this way makes watering easier and assures proper transition into dormancy. Also, not all plants lose all of their green leaves when dormant, and it's not uncommon for some to hold a few leaves well past the point when irrigation has stopped.

The onset of dormancy is caused by several factors: the maturity of the pseudobulb, shortening day length, cooler day/night temperatures and a reduction of root zone moisture. Generally, this process occurs naturally; however, when the plants are cultivated in warm growing areas such as in the home or under lights, dormancy sometimes needs to be encouraged. I have found that managing irrigation is one of the best tools to trigger dormancy. Decrease watering frequency in November and stop watering in mid-December, regardless of the number of green leaves. This will trigger dormancy in plants that are resisting the transition.

Have you had challenges overwintering your Catasetinae plants? If you are losing plants due to excessive dehydration, this may be caused by long periods of low humidity. Here is a solution that is being used successfully by some ingenious growers.



Set the pot in a jar with water, making a loose-fitting seal with the rim of the jar. The water should not touch the bottom of the pot. The reservoir will maintain high humidity around the roots, even while the plant remains dry during dormancy. This innovative technique produces great results! We have had lots of positive feedback from growers who are using this method.

By late December, it's important to get your Catasetinae into the dormant stage and provide them with an adequate rest period so that they will "wake up" early in the spring to a long growing season.

As my Catasetinae go to "sleep" for the winter I am reminded of an old proverb (with apologies to Ben Franklin) "*Early to bed and early to rise, makes a plant healthy, happy and floriferous.*"

Your support as customers and friends is truly appreciated!

I am always available to take your calls and E-mails, so please feel free to contact me. I love to talk orchids!

And as always, Good Growing!

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