

Successful Paphiopedilum Growing - My Top Ten Tips



Paphiopedilums are a relatively trouble free orchid genus to grow as long as you establish an environment that they appreciate and management practices that suit their needs. I grow all types of paphipedilums from the large exhibition type to the smallest of species and find basically their culture requirements are similar. Paphiopedilums are also a genus that does not seem to suffer from the insect attacks and diseases of many other genera.especially if they are grown well. How do you grow them well? Here are ten helpful tips that I find work for me:

Environment

Start off with a good environment. So often we are caught up with acquiring plants, plants and more plants. After all plants are what the hobby is all about. How sad it is when plants hastily purchased are lost because our housing was not suitable. Overcrowding, inadequate cover from the weather and incorrect shading have killed many a paphiopedilum. Construct a glasshouse with 70% shade cloth that is a least twice as big as you think you will need and you are well on your way.

Acquiring Stock

Always start off with healthy well rooted plants that appear to be growing well. Look for evidence of new growth and try to establish that the plant is firm in the pot. If the top growth looks healthy and shiny, usually the roots are OK. Purchase both seedlings and mature plants so you have some excitement with plants flowering and the expectation of growing seedlings on to first flowering.

Repot Regularly

This is the single most important hint for success. Use good quality mix and new pots. It is a false economy to reuse some of the old mix and leave plants until they look like they need repotting. This is often too late! I repot seedlings ever year and mature plants ever two years. It is sometimes hard to do this when they look to be growing so well.however you will be rewarded with even better growth.

Watering

Never over water especially in cool to cold weather. If you have any doubt about whether to water on not.don't! Leave it for another day or two then water early in the morning on a sunny day.

Inspect your plants

It is important that you regularly inspect your plants. If you visit your growing area regularly you become very skilled at spotting problems before they escalate. Like most things successful orchid growing is proportional to the amount of effort you put in. I try to look over my plants every day.even if it is after work under lights!

Fertilise

This is a key factor in successful paphiopedilum growing. I have found that paphiopedilums like a weak, regular and varied fertiliser program. I fertilise every time I water with a very weak solution, rotating organic and chemical fertilisers from week to week. Although my plants slow down their growth in winter, I still fertilise as there is some growth and they are building up reserves for the main spring/summer growing season, and later winter flowering season. I fertilise over the leaves, as I am convinced paphiopedilums like this foliage feeding.

Growing Medium

I use a basic bark mix and nothing else! I have tried everything in just about every combination but am convinced that the medium you grow in is not that important, what is vital is that it is fresh, well drained and regularly replaced. Use a finer bark for seedlings and medium grade for mature plants. It always amazes me that some growers will spend big dollars for a plant, yet not want to spend a few cents on regular repotting as the bark/pot will cost too much!

Uniform Growing

Repot all new purchases into your potting medium. In this way when you come to water / fertilise there is uniformity in drainage and nutrient acquisition. So many people just bring home a new plant put it on the bench, often ending up with several different mediums (Sphagnum moss to bark/rock mix) next to one another. They then try to water and fertilise them the same. It doesn't work.

Dividing Plants

I always repot and divide the bulk of plants in October/November as they are usually finished flowering and are in active growth. Make sure you divide big plants into two or three growths. Don't be mean and separate into a lot of single growths. Often the shock results in growths that sit for years and never make new growth. Repot your divisions (in fact all paph plants) according to the root mass size, not the size of the top growth. You have to discipline yourself to do this, but it is vital to successful paphiopedilum growing.

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Read as much as you can about paphiopedilum growing and find out what works in your conditions. When you find a successful formula don't change it, maintain it. Always be a good listener, you may not agree, but it all adds to the cumulative knowledge that may be invaluable at some stage. Ask successful growers about their success, most are only too pleased to share their knowledge. Successful paphiopedilum growing is proportional to establishing a good environment, regularly inspecting your plants and having good ongoing management skills.

Gary Hart, 2007