

## ***Dendrobium speciosum* (syn *Thelychiton speciosus*)**

The Rock Orchid/Rock Lily      -Cultural notes for the Riverina region of NSW

### **Introduction**

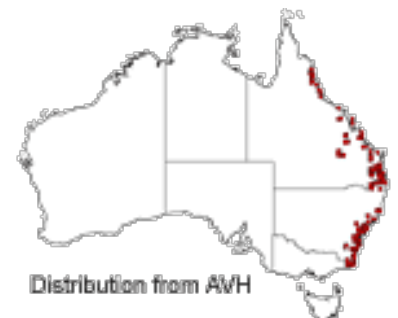
Many Australian Dendrobiums have recently been reclassified with those commonly known as 'Rock Orchids' or 'Rock Lilies' now coming under the genus *Thelychiton* (1). Within this genus, *Thelychiton kingianus* and *Thelychiton speciosus* are amongst the more commonly and easily grown in frost-free environments (2). Many growers and books will continue to refer to these species under the older and more familiar *Dendrobium* genus name.



There are a great variety of vegetative forms within *T. speciosus* that vary in stature from short to very tall. Many only flower well every second year. Flowers can be very strongly perfumed. Flowering is concentrated in late winter-spring. They can bloom off the same pseudobulbs for a number of seasons (2). Both *T. kingianus* and *T. speciosus* have been used in extensive crossing and selection programs to produce a wide variety in flower colours.

*D. delicatum* (*Tetrabaculum tetragonum*) is a natural hybrid of *T. kingianus* and *D. tarberi* found in eastern NSW to north Queensland (2).

*T. speciosus* is not only a widespread Australian orchid, but its varieties can be found in varying habitats on branches (epiphyte) of rainforest trees or on sandstone in open forest, spread out along the east coast of Australia and in and along the tropic of Capricorn (see adjacent map). As a lithophyte, it can produce large spreading clumps on rocks and cliff faces, often in full sun, with its roots forming a dense matt across the rock. It can be found from the coastline to the mountains.



### **Temperature requirements**

They can withstand the extreme temperatures experienced in the Riverina region providing there is protection from frosts and some shading from the sun if you want to have unblemished leaves. It regularly endures summer temperatures of 45°C and winter temperatures as low as 0°C.

### **Light**

They can withstand full sun but to avoid sun damaged leaves it's best to provide some shading, (50-70% shade cloth in the Riverina in summer) and the more light you give them the more flowers will be produced. They can have full sun in late autumn and winter.

### **Humidity and air movement**

It is important to provide plenty of air movement, if you can provide humidity it is a bonus but not essential.



## Water

Watering depends upon the size pot, how large the *speciosus* is and also what growing medium is used. Generally water every 3 days in summer for large pots and every 2 days for smaller pots. If you have a very dense potting medium then you would probably water less than that. For spring and autumn, every 5 days, every fortnight in winter, and once again it depends on pot size with smaller pots requiring more frequent watering than larger ones. The number one cause of orchids failing to establish and do well is overwatering as root rot will occur very quickly.

## Potting medium

Local growers use Mount Gambier bark 15-20mm for large plants and 10-15mm for smaller seedlings mixed with perlite to a ratio of 50/50 and as for most orchids repot in spring. Squat pots are used as the plants do not have deep root systems.

Plants can also be grown in hanging baskets or mounted on boards. When mounting plants they can be secured with wire and the roots covered with sphagnum moss which is held in place by material such as a strip of shade cloth (see photo above).



## Fertilizers

*T. speciosus* plants should be fertilized periodically with blood and bone (especially in spring and autumn) and a dilute soluble fertilizer applied regularly during the growing season. An inline fertilizer connected to the hose, such as Magamp, is an effective way of promoting flowering.

## Hot-cold hybrids

New hybrids have been produced to give larger and more colourful flowers. These typically are crosses using *D. kingianum*, *D. speciosum* and *D. tetragonum*.

If tropical species have been used in the parentage more warmth will need to be given in winter, otherwise they will tolerate similar cool conditions as *speciosus*.



## Other Dendrobium/Thelychiton species.

A more detailed description of these and other Australian *Dendrobium* (*Thelychiton*) species and their cultural requirements can be found in the references listed below.

## Further reading

These notes are based on information provided by local growers and the references listed below.

1. Growing Orchids in Cool Climate Australia (second edition) by M J Fraser, J Wright, W Ferris (2013).
2. Gardening Australia Flora's Orchids. ABC Books (2005).
3. Australian Dendrobiums and their Cultivation. by A Hope.  
<http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles/austden.htm>

4. How I Grow Australian Dendrobiums (and Dockrillias) by B Milligan.  
<http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles2/dend.htm>

Updated 14/9/15

These notes are intended as a guide only and are composed from available information and local experience. The Wagga Wagga Orchid Society and its members are not responsible for any loss or damage.