

Oncidium Orchid Growing in the Riverina region of NSW

-Dancing Lady Orchids

Oncidiums originate in Central and South America, mostly in cooler mountainous regions. There are in excess of 600 species and 9800 hybrids (2). This genus now includes *Cochlioda* and *Odontoglossums* (2). Most grow as epiphytes in trees and on rocks but some are terrestrial. They grow from sea level to 4000m (1). The *O. crispum* and *O. varicosum* hybrids are easy to grow and have a brown or yellow labellum. They can be grown in most frost free parts of Australia. Their peak flowering is in autumn, but can flower throughout the year.

Temperature requirements

They vary in temperature requirements depending on their origin. *O. crispum* and *O. varicosum* and their hybrids will grow in an unheated shade-house in Melbourne and the Riverina (3). Many will tolerate temperatures as low as 0°C up to 43°C for short periods but prefer temperatures in the range 8-30°C (7). Where the minimum temperature is kept at 8°C through heating, plants will initiate growth earlier and have larger pseudobulbs and flower better (1,2). Humidity must be kept higher as temperature increases. They will not tolerate frosts.

Light

They prefer about 50-70% shade or 1500-3000fc in summer but higher light in winter (3000-5000fc), similar to *Cymbidiums* and *Cattleyas* (1,3,4,7). Leaves should be bright lime green. Reddish green or yellow foliage indicates too much light, dark green insufficient light (4,6). Increase shade in summer if temperatures are very high.

Humidity and air movement

They prefer a humid environment with 55-75% humidity (4). Damp down the greenhouse floor or use misters to increase humidity. Protect against hot dry wind. They like good air movement particularly as humidity increases. Where necessary this can be provided by roof vents or a fan.

Water

They prefer frequent watering in warmer months providing they are allowed to dry out between watering (3,4). Plants grown on mounts may need to be watered daily in summer.

They like a drier rest during cooler winter months after flowering finishes in April-May and they become dormant (1). When root tips turn green to white this is another sign plants have become dormant (3).

Watering should recommence in about September when new growths start. Shade-houses should have a solid polycarbonate roof to shelter them from winter rain while allowing good light (3). Pseudobulbs can be allowed to shrivel slightly over winter and they will become plump again in spring (1). If plants are



kept too wet they will lose their roots (1). Overwatering in winter and poor drainage are primary causes of plant loss (3). If plants have wrinkled leaves they may not be getting enough water and may need repotting.

Overwatering particularly in cool weather and poor drainage are a common cause of poor plant growth and these should be investigated if plants are not performing well.

Avoid getting water on the flower spikes just before flowering (7).

Potting medium

They can be grown mounted on wood, bark or tree-fern slabs or grown in pots or wooden baskets (1). Mounted plants allow quicker drying after watering. Keep pots as small as possible. Ensure you have at least 3 bulbs and a new shoot to a division when subdividing (4).

Potting medium varies with your watering regime and plant size. As they have finer roots they do best with a smaller grade (9-12mm) bark/pearlite 50:50 mix or 3 parts bark to 1 perlite. Larger bark size assists with good drainage which is essential (3).

A plant with a healthy bulb and leaves but no roots can be encouraged to grow roots by mounting on bark and spraying with water and weak fertilizer daily and roots should appear in spring. Plants mounted on bark slabs need more frequent watering.

Plants in pots should be repotted about every two years. Plants should be repotted as soon as they have commenced active growth in spring and shoots are 5-7cm tall (4) and green root tips are present (7). Ensure base of new growth is planted about 1.5cm deep into bark but no deeper (4). They prefer squat shaped pots and do not over pot, use a pot only slightly larger than the old one (7).

If roots grow out of the pot this does not affect the plant growth (7).

Fertilizers

They require frequent application of quarter to half strength fertilizer during their growing season. Root tips can die and roots turn brown if the fertilizer is too concentrated (1).

A teaspoon of gypsum and half a teaspoon of Dolomite sprinkled on the top of the pot will add calcium, magnesium and counter excess acidity (7).

Diseases

Oncidiums are susceptible to leaf bacterial and fungal diseases. Oncidium Sharry Baby is particularly susceptible to black spotting of the leaves. The infection is facilitated by water on the leaves. Monthly application of Mancozeb in the warmer months will help controlling these problems. Also avoid watering in the heat of the day and late afternoon when leaves may stay wet during the evening. If possible water the pot not the leaves.



Intergeneric hybrids

Oncidiums have been crossed with many other genera to form hybrids. These include

- Aliceara (Alcra) = Brassia x Miltonia x Oncidium
- Bakerara (Bak) = Brassia x Miltonia x Oncidium x Odontoglossum
- Burrageara (Burr) = Cochlioda x Miltonia x Oncidium x Odontoglossum
- Colmanara (Colm) = Miltonia x Odontoglossum x Oncidium
- Goodaleara (Gdlra) = Brassia x Cochlioda x Miltonia x Oncidium x Odontoglossum
- Brassidium (Brsdm) = Brassia x Oncidium
- Wilsonara (Wil) = Cochlioda x Oncidium x Odontoglossum
- Withnerara (With) = Aspasia x Miltonia x Oncidium x Odontoglossum

Suggested varieties

Good plants to start with are *Oncidium sotoanum* and *O. varicosum* and their hybrids. Also Beallara Tahoma Glacier, Odcm Wildcat, Colmanara Jungle Monarch, Oncidium Sharry Baby.



Further reading and acknowledgements

The information in this guide has been gained from local growers and the publications below.

1. Oncidiums and their cultivation by D Weise.
<http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles/oncids.htm>
2. Growing Orchids in Cool Climate Australia. By M Fraser, J Wright and W Ferris. Second edition.
3. How I grow Oncidiums by B Milligan. <http://www.oscov.asn.au/articles2/oncids.htm>
4. Oncidium culture. Carter and Holmes Orchids.
<http://carterandholmes.com/oncindodocare.html>
5. Beautiful orchids. Oncidium care.
http://www.beautifulorchids.com/orchids/orchids_potted/oncidium/oncidium_care.html
6. The Oncidium alliance. <http://www.clanorchids.com/culture/oncicult.htm>
7. Oncidium Intergeneric Orchids.
<https://queenslandorchid.wordpress.com/2014/07/09/culture-sheet-oncidium-intergeneric-dancing-lady-orchids/>

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