

Australasian Native Orchid Society Illawarra

Growing Hints for *Sarcochilus*

Sarcochilus, generally, are easy to grow provided they have good air movement, moderate to high humidity, shady to semi-shady conditions, good drainage and light feeding all year round. They can be categorized into two main groups: LITHOPHYTES and EPIPHYTES.

1. Lithophytes

These tend to grow best in pots and include the species: *Sarcochilus hartmannii*, *S. aequalis*, *S. fitzgeraldii*, *S. ceciliae* & *S. roseus*. Also included in this section are most hybrids as these species are the most used in hybridizing.

The easiest to grow are *S. hartmannii*, *S. aequalis* and *S. fitzgeraldii*. These can be grown in a mix of equal parts of pine bark & pebbles to which is added a lesser amounts of any or all of the following: charcoal, peat moss, leaf mould, dried tree fern fibre or perlite. *Sarcochilus fitzgeraldii* requires slightly more shade & moisture than the first two.

Sarcochilus ceciliae & *S. roseus* need to be grown in shallow terra-cotta with a very coarse mix or even just chunks of sandstone. They need to be planted well above the mix to ensure good drainage. Flowering can be improved if the plants are given more light during winter & early spring. Care should be taken to ensure that they are not attacked by scale insects as these can destroy the plants even though the roots remain active.

In frost-free areas, plants can be grown in shadehouses, although some growers prefer growing them in a separate section with a fibreglass roof. Where frost is a problem, they can be grown in a cool glasshouse. They require approx. 60% shade.

2. Epiphytes

These grow best on mounts such as cork bark, old hardwood (e.g. fence palings), well-weathered tree fern fibre or handmade mounts of plastic netting, such as gutter guard, filled with a coarse potting medium as used for the lithophytes. Attach them using nylon fishing line, old nylon stocking cut into strips or plastic coated twist ties. The easiest species in this section is *Sarcochilus falcatus*, the orange blossom orchid. It requires approx. 70% shade and humid conditions.

The other species in this section are more difficult to grow. *Sarcochilus olivaceus* needs similar conditions to *S. falcatus*. *S. australis*, *S. dilatatus*, *S. hillii* & *S. minutiflos* require drier conditions and about 60% shade. *Sarcochilus hirticalcar*, *S. moorei*, *S. serrulatus*, *S. spathulatus* & *S. weinthalii* require intermediate watering and between 60/70% shade.

Watering

Sarcochilus species and hybrids need regular watering as they do not have pseudobulbs in which to store water. They should be kept moist through their growing season but allowed to dry out every day in the summer months. It is best to water in the morning to allow all day for the plant to dry out before nightfall. Plants grown on mounts need more frequent watering than plants in pots.

Fertilizing

Feed plants regularly through the growing season with less frequent feeds the rest of the year. There are many different fertilizers available, both organic and inorganic. If using any of the special orchid formulations, follow the directions on the packet. If using general fertilizers such as Aquasol, etc, use at half the recommended strength. Some growers use well-aged manures such as sheep or poultry or blood & bone sprinkled around the top of the pot but away from the roots.

In the Garden

Most of the epiphytic species can be grown in the garden, mounted onto trees. *Sarcochilus falcatus* and *S. olivaceus* are best but the other species can be grown if conditions are right. Virtually any trees except eucalypts that shed bark are suitable. Some of the best are lilly-pilly, paperbarks, ti-trees, bottlebrushes, casuarinas, blueberry ash or lemon trees.

Simply tie the plant to a branch of the tree using nylon stocking or twist tie until the roots are attached to the tree.

Need More Information?

Why not join our Society? We met the 2nd Tuesday of each month in Legacy House, 96 Market Street, Wollongong starting at 7.00 p.m.

Other ANOS groups and associated native orchid societies are located throughout Australia & New Zealand. Contact the Secretary, ANOS Inc. PO Box 2165, Taren Point, NSW 2229.