

Australasian Native Orchid Society Illawarra

Growing Hints for Australian Terrestrial Orchids

There are between 700-800 species of native orchid in Australia. Of these, approx. 75% are known as “terrestrial” orchids (i.e. they grow in the ground) whereas the other 25% are “epiphytes” (grow in trees) or “lithophytes” (grow on rocks). The majority of terrestrial orchids are found in the temperate regions of Australia.

Most terrestrial orchids are deciduous, however, there are a few evergreen terrestrials that can easily be grown locally. These are *Phaius tankervilleae* (Swamp Orchid) and *Calanthe triplicata* (Christmas Orchid). Both of these species develop extensive root systems so need to be grown in large pots. A suitable mix would be 2 parts leaf mould, 1 part coarse sand and 1 part aged pine bark plus some blood & bone. Alternatively, a good quality commercial cymbidium mix may be used. Both can be grown under 50% shade and should be kept well watered all year round.

The vast majority of terrestrial orchids grown by native orchid growers are the temperate deciduous ones and these vary in requirements according to species. A basic mix as developed by growers in Victoria is 2 parts of coarse sand, 1 part rich loam, 1 part buzzer chips (i.e. chips and shavings obtained from woodworking machines), 1 part leaf mould with a little blood & bone and garden lime or dolomite added at the rate of 1 dessertspoon to 9 litres of mix.

Another mix is 3 parts coarse sand, 1 part loam, 1 part leaf mould & 1 part coarse organic matter. Another simple mix is equal quantities of a good quality organic potting mix & coarse sand. Blood & bone can be added to both of these.

Colony Forming *Pterostylis* (Greenhoods)

Generally, these are the easiest to grow. Grow in basic mix in 50% shade. Watering regime will depend on flowering time of particular species but should commence at the beginning of the growth cycle as the new shoots emerge above ground. Commence with light watering and increase as plants become more active in growth. When the leaves start to wither, cease watering so pots dry out for repotting which should be done each year when plants are dormant. Thereafter, only the occasional moistening is required to stop the tuberoids from drying out.

Non-Colony Forming *Pterostylis*

These are a little more difficult to maintain in cultivation. Grow as for colony formers but more care is required when watering, as tuberoids tend to rot. Repot every 1-2 years.

Rufa Group & Allied Species Pterostylis

Even more difficult to grow. Requires one part extra sand added to basic mix with 25- 50% shade. Repot every 1-3 years. Correct watering is vital to ensure plants do not rot off. During the growing season, the mix should never remain wet but only just moist at all times. As the rosettes start to die off, reduce watering, as this is when the tuberoids are especially prone to rotting.

Caladenia (Spider Orchids)

Can be difficult to grow. Add one extra part of coarse sand to basic mix. Shade of 25-50% needed. Water as for Rufa Pterostylis. Do not allow mix to dry out during the growing season. Keep dry during dormant season. Grow better in larger pots than used for Pterostylis as the tuberoids tend to form deeper in the pot each year. Repot every 2-3 years.

Diuris (Donkey Orchids)

Generally easy to grow with showy flowers. Use basic mix in 25% shade. Keep mix moist but not wet during growing season.

Thelymitra

Generally easy to grow, Flowers open on hot, sunny days. Grow in basic mix in 25% shade. Water over growing season, late February to late spring. Repot every 1-2 years.

Acianthus, Cyrtostylis and Chiloglottis

Use basic mix in 50% shade. Water as for colony forming Pterostylis.

Corybas (Helmet Orchids)

Basic mix plus 1 part extra leaf mould in 70% shade. Keep well watered through growing season as they require a cool, moist environment. Developing flowers can be protected with a clear plastic container (e.g. Chinese take-away) or plastic bag over top of pot.

A good book with detailed cultivation notes is “ Cultivation of Australian Native Orchids” produced by the Australasian Native Orchid Society Victorian Group Inc. PO Box 2685, Cheltenham, Vic., 3192.

Need More Information?

Why not join our Society? We meet the 2nd Tuesday of each week 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.

ANOS members also have access to a tuberoid bank where they can purchase tuberoids donated by other members.