

## **CATTLEYA CULTURE**

*(CAT-lee-yah)*

### **Habitat:**

Most species of the cattleya alliance are native to the middle elevations of Central and South America. Flowers come in many colors and fragrances

To grow and flower cattleyas well, we must understand the native habitat and the conditions under which they grow and thrive.

The majority of this group grows as epiphytes on the forest fringes or high in the canopy of the trees where they can receive strong but filtered light. They have developed water storage devices (pseudobulbs) with large fleshy roots to adsorb water.

### **Temperature:**

Cattleyas need a 10 to 20 degrees Fahrenheit temperature difference between night and day. A daytime range of 75 to 85 degrees is optimum; nights around 60 degrees are desirable. Plants can take temperatures of up to 95-100 degrees and down to around 40 without ill affects.

### **Light:**

Cattleyas grow and flower best with strong, filtered sunlight. In the home, placing them in an eastern, western or lightly shaded southern exposure can simulate growth. The most common cause for failure to flower is insufficient light. Growth and flower spikes should develop straight and strong in good light.

Foliage should be a medium olive green. If the growths are weak and floppy, and the foliage appears dark green, the amount or strength of light is insufficient. Conversely, if the foliage is more on the yellow side and quite hard, the plant is getting a lot of light. Watch for sunburn when plants are in direct sunlight.

Cattleya will perform well under a wide range of conditions, so get to know your plant by keen observational habits, and you will be able to tell if your plant is happy.

### **Humidity:**

Humidity range from 40% to 60% is generally recommended. In the home, plants can be placed on a gravel-water filled tray or saucer taking care that the pot is not sitting directly in water. Air movement is very important to the well being of the plant as stagnant air will enhance mold and fungus infestations as well as provide a breeding ground for pests.

**Water: (How do they live in nature?)**

In nature, these plants have exposed roots and enjoy a rapid cycle of wetting and drying. This wet-dry cycle must be duplicated by allowing the plants to become dry before watering.

Most new growers tend to overwater. When in doubt, don't water. However, common sense is the watchword. Lift the pot. If it feels light, you probably need to water. Pseudobulbs shouldn't be allowed to shrivel from lack of water. Actively growing plants need more water than when the plant is dormant or cool conditions.

**Fertilizer:**

Feeding should be done on a regular schedule. A high nitrogen fertilizer (30-10-10) can be applied or a balanced fertilizer (10-10-10 or 20-20-20). During cool conditions, fertilize less. Some growers apply fertilizer at ½ strength with every watering. Be careful not to over feed. Orchids generally are not heavy feeders. You may feed "weakly, weekly."

**Repotting**

Plants should be repotted when the first pseudobulb protrudes over the edge of the pot and begins to grow new roots; usually in the spring time to allow new divisions to become established.

Repot if the potting medium has broken down (after 2-3 years) or the plant shows adverse growing conditions (i.e., shriveled leaves or pseudobulbs). Divide plants when each division has 3-5 pseudobulbs. When repotting, remove all dry and rotted roots, old sheathes, weeds and roots. The plant can be dipped in Physan™ for mold and fungus. Remove all pests at this time with toothbrush and rubbing alcohol.

Pot size is important. Plants should be allowed to have room for 2-3 years of growth (about ½ the pot). Pack potting medium (medium bark/#3 perlite [3:1 mixes) firmly around roots and plant. Can add charcoal with a bark:perlite:charcoal ratio of 3:1:1. For larger plants with large roots use large bark or potting medium. Some people let the newly repotted plant set for a few days before watering; some water and let the plant dry out completely.

**Mounting**

Cattleyas can also be mounted on just about anything. Remember where they live in nature; in the trees!