

GROWING CATASETUMS

Here are some notes a few of us took when Mark Margolis spoke to us about growing Catasetums! I've also added some notes from Fred Clark's newsletter and Carter & Holmes website (Sandi).

LIGHT

Catasetums are light friendly. The light they get used to in their initial growth spurt is the light they will be adapted to. Mark grows most of his with a 50% shade screen. He likes to push them with high light. He has seen them growing on the top of palm trees in full sun. He does grow some in his backyard in full sun.

FERTILIZER

There aren't too many orchids that grow as fast as Catasetums in a short period of time. Therefore, fertilizing on a regular basis is important. He uses a balanced fertilizer two or three times a week. He also uses a time released fertilizer in the media as well. If you are using a misting system, Mark suggests using a weak fertilizer solution in the mist. Urea nitrogen isn't readily available to the plants so be sure to use a Cal-Mag type of fertilizer.

WHEN TO STOP WATERING

The first indications of leaf yellowing and leaf drop are the signal for the beginning of dormancy. (This usually happens in our area at the end of October or beginning of November.) This is when you should stop fertilizing and cut back on watering frequency. You want to simulate the end of the wet season, as it happens in nature. This change in culture will cause the pseudobulbs to harden off, in preparation for dormancy. When most leaves are yellow/brown and have dropped off, cease watering altogether. This marks the start of the dormant period.

The onset of dormancy is caused by several factors: the maturity of the pseudobulb, shortening day length, cooler day/night temperatures and a reduction of root zone moisture. Generally, this process occurs naturally; however, when the plants are cultivated in warm growing areas such as in the home or under lights, dormancy sometimes needs to be encouraged. Fred Clark says he has found that stopping watering in late December, regardless of the number of green leaves, will trigger dormancy in plants that are resisting the necessary transition. By late December, it's important to get your Catasetinae into the dormant stage; to provide them with an adequate rest period so that they will 'wake up' early in the spring to a long growing season. Fred says that "as my Catasetinae go to 'sleep' for the winter, I'm reminded of an old proverb (with apologies to Ben Franklin) "Early to bed and early to rise, makes you healthy, happy and floriferous." Mark leaves them outside and they get whatever water nature provides; some people bring them under cover of a roof or covered patio. If you do that, per Carter & Holmes website, you could sprinkle very lightly when necessary, just enough to keep the bulbs from shriveling.

MEDIA FOR NEW GROWTH OR DIVIDING

Mark grows in clay and plastic pots. The bottom half of the pot has sphagnum and a few Styrofoam peanuts at the very bottom. The top half consists of media that will drain well...rock, charcoal, Aliflor, bark, and bits of sphagnum. He also mixes time release into the media. He doesn't cut old roots.

WHEN TO REPOT & START WATERING

When a new growth appears at the base of the pseudobulb, you can repot the plant. The plants should be repotted yearly for best growth, but this is not a rigid rule. The Carter & Holmes website states not to

hurry potting - late May is soon enough. The new lead should be at least four inches long and have abundant roots about two inches long before potting. It says to hold the pseudobulb in the center of the pot and pack the medium around it, not too tightly. The new roots should just touch the medium (potting lower encourages root rot). You may have to stake the bulb or perhaps clamp the old dead roots down with a pot clip. It is most important that the bottom of the bulb be placed at the top of the medium, which should be damp but not wet. Do not water for three or four days - then begin watering and fertilizing.

Here is a photo of when to start watering from Mark's presentation:



BACKBULBS

The "backbulbs" can be used to start additional plants. Remove the old roots and lay the backbulbs down on a bench top or in a flat until a new growth starts at the bottom or sides of the pseudobulb. It may take several months for the new growth to appear on the old bulbs. Simply pot the pseudobulb so that the new growth is at the surface of the potting media. If several growths appear along the sides of the pseudobulb, then it can be laid on the surface of the potting media.

PESTS

Catasetums in full growth are prone to attacks by spider mites. This problem can be avoided to some extent by high humidity and good air circulation. Do not use insecticidal soaps on flower spikes. The new growths and flower spikes are favorite food for slugs and snails. Grasshoppers will eat the flower buds. Regular use of a systemic fungicide seems to help in preventing rot of the new growths.

WHERE TO PURCHASE CATASETUMS AND THEIR RELATIVES

Sunset Valley Orchids—Fred Clark—He comes to orchid shows in our area

Jumbo Orchids—They also come to some shows

Bela Vista Orchids—He comes to some shows if timing isn't a problem

Krull-Smith—Has started to grow Catasetums