

Cymbidium monthly Culture

EARLY-MID SUMMER CULTURE

- The **growing season** is now well and truly under way. Root action should be strong, with also strong new growths being produced on those plants in good condition. The aim of our culture is to ensure this active growth is maintained for as long and as vigorously as possible. Remember, if a plant does receive a check in its growth, it is often some time before growth can be returned to optimum levels, and any check can affect subsequent flower production. Just because a plant has no flowers at this time of the year, do not forget about it, or you will find subsequent flowering will be reduced.
- All **repotting** should have been completed by now, with the plants showing their appreciation of new media by strong healthy growth. Unless a plant is obviously in poor condition, defer any uncompleted repotting now until early autumn.
- The **temperature** now will be increasing, with the lengthening days. All plants should now be in their **summer homes**. Do not leave the plants in an enclosed area as they need plenty of fresh moving air at this time of the year. Summer night temperatures no higher than 18 - 20 degrees celsius for cymbidiums are essential for the completion of successful **bud initiation** of next years flowers. *Growing a plant too warm at this time of the year is the most common reason for non flowering of cymbidiums.* The low temperature, bud initiation response is enhanced by higher light levels
- It is generally recommended that plants be in **shadehouse**, under say 50% shade, or under the outer branches of a tree will also suffice. Some protection of the strongest mid-day sun will be appreciated, but direct sun early and late in the day will be enjoyed by the plants. If you have been growing your plants somewhat shaded, do not expose them suddenly to direct sun, otherwise burning of the foliage can occur. You do not sunbathe in full sun for a long period when you first go on your holiday, so tread your plants the same by introducing them to the summer sun gradually. Aim to have the leaves a yellow-green colour; if they are a deep green generally not enough light is being given.

If you place the plants outside, keep them off the ground on bricks or wood. This prevents the entry of earthworms into the mix, and also allows better ventilation around the plants.

- With the warmer conditions and more active growth, greater attention to **watering** is required. When you do water your plants, apply copious quantities and allow the surplus to run freely from the container. If you spray, dampen the mix first, then, some minutes later, give another good soaking. This ensures the mix gets truly wet, and the application of plenty of water allows the flushing out from the mix of any salts which may have accumulated. Allow the top 25 to 50 mm of the media in larger pots to dry before watering again. Remember overwatering involves the too frequent watering of the plants; if you do this the roots can die as the essential access of air to the roots is prevented. The actual frequency of watering will vary, as such factors as the weather, size of the pot, growing media utilised, and growth activity ;determines water utilisation, and therefore each grower must assess their own situation.. The correct watering of the plants at this time of the year is most important, and should not be neglected. If you are going away for your holidays, try and get someone to care for your plants. While they should survive your absence, if they are neglected, their growth may be interrupted, which in turn can cause reduction in next seasons flower production.

- The plants will appreciate some **fertiliser** during this period of their most active growth. While the new vegetative growths are small, a higher nitrogen fertiliser is appropriate, especially in bark based growing media. As the growths mature and reach their full size, a change to a lower nitrogen fertiliser will assist in the maturing of the pseudobulbs, and assist in flower bud initiation. Generally a low nitrogen, high potash fertiliser will be best from mid-summer on. Flowering may be also encouraged by applying magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts) at the rate of one teaspoonful per 5 litres of water monthly from mid summer to mid autumn.
- Watch for **red spider mite and false spider mite** infections at this time of the year. The effects of these pests can be reduced by maintaining higher humidity around the plants. The frequent misting of the plants, especially on the underside of the foliage, can reduce the infestation, and the plants will additionally appreciate the moisture and cooling effect. If the pests do become established, chemical sprays may be required. Malathion will control, although specific insecticides may give better results; often two applications given 7 to 10 days apart will ensure a complete kill. The suitable chemicals should be used with care, because although they are of relatively low toxicity, they are still poisons and can still affect to grower or other persons if they are not used correctly. Make sure you read the product labels, and apply correctly and observe all stated precautions.
- Those growing the early flowering plants may already be enjoying the excitement of seeing the **new flower spikes**. Look at, and handle your plants frequently to see the progress in their growth, and to ensure adequate protection can be given to the spikes once they are seen.