

## IMPORTANT MONTHS

### JANUARY

All your Orchid repotting and dividing should have been completed by now. With the hot weather starting it is still important to keep a close watch on the plants. When the weather is cool and the atmosphere is moist, the Orchids should only need to be watered twice a week (still check the pots each day to make sure the soil has not dried out). Once the temperature reaches about 36 degrees C, I would suggest that you water the plants every day if needed. During the Summer time water the plants at sundown as well as wetting the leaves. If there is a breeze the leaves will cool down as the water evaporates. Cooling down helps to initiate new flower spikes for next year. Place wood shavings or leaf mulch on the floor where the plants are. Excess water that drains through the pots will be absorbed by the sawdust or mulch and will help to provide humidity around the plants. Feed the plants this time of year with a low nitrogen fertiliser (Bloom Booster) to assist the development of next year's flower spikes. Keep a close eye on the leaves to make sure the plants are not attacked by pests or fungi. If there is a problem, take a specimen in a sealed plastic bag to your nearest Nursery or Garden Centre for identification. Now is the time to fertilize with a low Nitrogen and higher Phosphorus and Potassium level. This will help the new flower spikes to develop for next flowering season.

### FEBRUARY

This is normally the hottest and driest month of the year, so it is important to keep the humidity in the Orchid House. Make sure that the hot, dry winds are prevented from getting in and drying the plants out. The best height to have your bench is about 30cm off the ground. Have a good depth of ground mulch spread underneath the benches. This will collect the moisture that drains through the bottom of the pots and this in turn will help to raise the humidity. Materials such as wood chips, pine bark, wood shavings and seaweeds are all good moisture collectors. Watering in the late afternoon is beneficial especially when there is a breeze as this will cool the plants down after a hot day. If the weather is cool, you may only need to water every two to three days. If it is hot then watering may be needed every day. Most important, keep the snail bait around the plants when the flower spikes appear to prevent damage to the buds.

### SEPTEMBER

The correct time to divide up or pot Orchid plants is after flowering. Non flowering bulbs can be potted from September to October, depending on the season. Make sure that all cutting tools are sterilised in a domestic bleach before you begin to cut up the plants. Before potting check that the Orchid Potting mixture is moist but not too wet. Tap the plant out of the pot and shake the old growing media away from the roots. Now cut and trim off any dead and broken roots. To avoid over potting choose the correct size of the container which your plant will be planted in comfortably. When you divide Orchids, it is important to select the correct area to cut to minimise damage to the bulbs. As you cut through the Orchid plant make sure to include at least one back bulbs with two young healthy bulbs (note that young bulbs take two or three years to flower). The back bulb is the bulb with no leaf. Fill approximately one third of the new pot with Orchid potting mix and then place your plant into the pot. Make sure that the top of the pot is approximately level with the bottom third of your orchid bulb and then add the rest of the potting medium into the container. Give the plant a good drink until the water flows out of the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot. The Orchid plants like to be kept moist all the year round but not wet. To answer the age-old question, I cannot tell you how often to water the plants, but only suggest that common sense is the only way. Weather conditions and soil mixtures both control how often you water the Orchid plants. One thing is that the plants love having their leaves watered as well as do their roots, but do not over water. Keep the pot plants spaced apart. Otherwise, the flowering spikes will be reduced next year. The most important point to remember is keep the plants free from insect pests. Fertilising the Orchids should be started in the peak growing season to obtain the best growth structure. They can be fed with a slow release or half the strength of the general recommended dose of liquid fertilisers. Most important: - prior to feeding liquid fertilisers, make sure you flush the potting medium in the Orchid container with clean water to eliminate any salts built up from previous fertiliser applications. I would suggest adding a quality soil wetting agent at the beginning of summer to ensure an even and uniform penetration of water.