

## STAKING CYMBIDIUMS

By Allan Hope

Those of you who have cymbidiums in spike will have noticed that many of the spikes are now extending at a fairly rapid pace. Once they reach a length of about 200 mm they may be staked. However, you must use your discretion, because some spikes need to develop more fully to provide enough flexibility to allow staking, tying and training. In fact, some varieties cannot be effectively trained at all, and you will need to allow the spike to follow its natural inclination.

Flower spikes seem to fit into three categories. Those that grow relatively **straight** and upright, those that have an **arching** habit and those that are **pendulous**. Many of the *Cymbidium devonianum* hybrids, such as *Cymbidium* Bulbarrow, fall into the last category, as do some of the good green and red large- and intermediate-flowered cymbidium hybrids. The only advice that can be given is to let the spikes do their own thing and allow them to cascade. Sometimes the emerging spike will decide to follow the surface of the compost or to try to burrow into it and you will need to correct this problem. An effective solution is to place one end of a plastic label under the emerging spike and the other end on the rim of the pot. This creates an upward-sloping ramp that the flower spike will follow over the rim.

For relatively **straight** spikes insert a stake away from the edge of the pot and in a position where you imagine the flowers will be seen to their best advantage. Try to work from a position either in front of or behind the spike to reduce the chance of catching a sleeve on the buds and breaking them off. Start tying at the base of the spike using one of the soft plastic-and-wire twisty-ties and progress towards the top. Avoid forcing the spike at this stage, as you may break it. Do not use any more ties than you feel are necessary, as the judges may penalise excessive tying. You may consider removing some of the ties once you have transported your plant to the meeting or show.

An effective way of straightening a leaning spike into an upright position is to use a long piece of twisty tie, which you can tighten gradually every few days. Some growers attach a piece of hat elastic to the spike below the topmost bud and fasten the other end of the elastic to a clothes peg clipped onto a long stake. The clothes peg is slid up the stake until the elastic is just taut, so that the spike is gradually straightened. The clothes peg needs upward adjustment every few days. When the spike has stopped growing, tie it as described above.

Other growers place a horizontal wire above the plants and hitch the spike to this with elastic or with spring-loaded 'yo-yos'. In either case care is required as the topmost buds can easily be broken off if too much force is applied. Leave the spike to 'set' in its final position, otherwise it will have little strength and may droop, or even break, when the elastic is eventually removed.

For those spikes with an **arching or decorative** habit, insert the stake at the desired angle and tie only up to the start of the curvature or arch. Keep the tie at this point looser than usual to allow the spike to move around a little as it grows, otherwise the weight of the developing buds may cause the stem to kink at the position of the last tie and eventually to snap. With arching spikes it is necessary to let the spike develop its own strength, that is, to be largely self-supporting. However, it's a good idea to position and tie a temporary stake away from the main stem to support the arching section before transporting such plants to a meeting or show, as arching spikes are easily broken in transit.

Finally, remember to stake your spikes late in the day when the sap is flowing, rather than early on a cold morning when the stems will be brittle and easily snapped.