

Vandaceous Culture

Vandaceous orchids include Vanda, Ascocenda, Phalaenopsis, Renanthera, Rhyncostylis, Aerides. They are monopodial orchids which have a single stem which produces new leaves at its growing tip and roots lower down the stem. Loosely speaking, the leaves of Vandaceous orchids form a fan shape. The leaves may be flat (like a strap, hence the term strap-leaf), terete (pencil shape) or a shape which is intermediate between the two. The strap-leaves require the same shade as Cattleyas while the teretes can grown in full sun, as long as they are given plenty of food and water.

WATERING

Vandaceous orchids require less water in winter than in summer.

SUMMER WATERING

From about the end of September through to the end of March, they can be watered every few days. If conditions are hot, dry and windy, they can be watered daily, early in the morning. It is sometimes a good idea to water them late in the afternoon, around 6pm, as the plants take up moisture more readily overnight. Do not water during the heat of the day as water can collect in the crown of the plant and the warmed water may encourage the growth of harmful pathogens. Tap water is fine.

WINTER WATERING

From about the beginning of April to the end of September, we cut down on watering substantially. In the colder months, we would only water weekly, and then we try to spray only the roots. These plants do not like to be wet overnight during the cold winter months. April/May and September, we would water every few days.

Whether it is Summer or Winter, the frequency of watering often depends on the conditions. If your orchids are not under cover and it has been raining, then obviously you would not need to water them. If however, it is a dull, overcast day, then you might want to wait until finer weather. More orchids have been killed by **overwatering** than underwatering. Vandaceous orchid like to dry out between waterings.

LIGHT

The best growth is obtained by growing in a shadehouse. However, very good results can be obtained by growing them in an area where they receive morning sun. Hanging under a patio roof with an Eastern exposure is ideal. Remember, the more light they get, the more fertilizer and water they need. You can attach them to a paling fence using an old stocking where they may get shaded from the midday sun and the afternoon sun by an overhanging tree. So long as they get that morning sun. Plants which are lush and dark green are not receiving enough light. Vandaceous leaves should be firm and a mid green colour, not too dark nor too light.

FEEDING

Vandaceous orchids are heavy feeders and small plants need regular applications of high nitrogen, water soluble fertilizer. The larger, flowering size plants do not need as much nitrogen. A flower boosting fertilizer is all they need as this contains enough nitrogen for growth and provides more phosphorous and potassium for better flower development.

AIR MOVEMENT

These orchids like plenty of air movement in Summer, especially around their root system. In Winter, some protection from the cold Westerlies would benefit them.

AERATION AND POTTING MEDIUM

Vandaceous orchid and indeed, most orchids, cannot be potted in soil as their roots require good aeration and the potting medium needs to drain freely. We use orchid bark and some pieces of charcoal. Small plants are best potted in small medium and large plants are best potted in larger medium. Generally speaking, the best time to repot is in Spring.

There are two main reasons for repotting – one is the plant has grown over the edge of the pot and become difficult to train and stake; and the other is that the potting medium has broken down. If you see that your plant has a problem, unpot it and check the state of the medium and the root system. If the medium is breaking down and soggy and wet, replace it. If the root system looks unhealthy (brown, soft, mushy roots) then you need to repot.

Always look for roots which are whitish and hard and in the growing season, will have green coloured root tips.

When repotting, do not overpot, use a pot which will allow 2-3 years growth. Wet the roots of the plant taking as much care as possible not to break them (they are quite brittle), squeeze the sides of the pot to loosen the potting medium, then take a firm fold near the base of the plant and gently start to pull the plant out of the pot. When you have the plant out of its pot, trim off all dead and soggy roots. Remember, live healthy roots will be whitish and firm. As you place the plant in your new pot, you may need to wind the longer roots into the inside of the pot. When you are happy with the plants position, place your new medium in the pot and around the roots. You may need to use a green bamboo stake to hold the plant steady as any wobbling will prevent new roots from establishing.

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