

LYCASTES



This genus produces large, showy, triangular flowers that are waxy and long lasting. Two cultural groups are generally recognized - the evergreen skinneri-type that flowers from leafy pseudobulbs, and the deciduous aromatica-type, that flower from leafless pseudobulbs.

Light requirements vary. Deciduous species prefer light conditions as for cattleyas, 50% to 70% shade. More light is usually provided as new growths form pseudobulbs. Evergreen species prefer less light, 60% to 80% shade.

Temperature for the evergreen species should be fairly constant and never too hot. Nights of 5 to 20°C and days of 25 to 30°C are desirable. The deciduous species of Lycaste can tolerate a upper range up to 40°C during the day and down to 5°C at night when dormant in the winter.

Water should be applied in larger amounts during active growth (usually summer) than when the plants are not producing new leaves and pseudobulbs. The potting medium should just begin to dry out before watering. Deciduous species should be kept almost completely dry when leafless; evergreen species should be kept only slightly drier than normal after pseudobulbs form. Water should be kept off the leaves, and especially out of new growths, to prevent rot or leaf spotting.

Humidity should be maintained at 40% to 70%. Deciduous species need less humidity when dormant. Brisk air circulation will help prevent damage to leaves by leaf spot fungi.

Fertilizer should be applied regularly and heavily when plants are actively growing. A high nitrogen formulation is recommended during active growth (usually summer); some grower's top-dress the potting medium with blood meal as new pseudobulbs form. In autumn or as growths mature and pseudobulbs are produced, fertilizer is reduced and/or switched to a high'-phosphorus formulation to stimulate flower production.

Potting is best when new growth start, usually in spring. A fine-grade potting medium is often used; bark and perlite (3:1) is a common well-draining mix, and sphagnum moss is also used with good results. When repotting, split plants into no less than two bulbs per pot and choose a pot to allow for two years of growth. The bottom one quarter to one third of the pot should be filled with drainage material, either bark, or Styrofoam The plant should be positioned in the pot so that the newest growths are farthest away from the edge of the pot, allowing the maximum number of new growths without crowding the pot. Spread the roots over a cone of potting medium and fill in around the roots with potting medium to the junction of the roots and the pseudobulbs. Firm the medium well around the roots by applying pressure. Keep humidity high and the potting medium on the dry side until new roots form.

Theses are a rewarding and generally easy orchid to grow, dare I say a good beginners orchid and an excellent subject for the specialist grower. A large specimen sized pot of any Lycaste in full bloom is a sight to behold and one that will always remain embedded in one's mind.