

## ZYGOPETALUMS



The first thing you notice about this orchid is its beautiful fragrance, its range of colours from apple, purple, reddish brown to blackberry and a combination of these colours, its long lasting flowers and its ease to grow.

Zygopetalums are both tree (epiphytes) dwellers and terrestrial (ground dwellers) found growing on the forest floor amongst leaf litter. So to grow them in cultivated conditions you have to have them potted in a fairly open orchid mixture. That is, one that allows the water to flush through the bottom of the pot. Most commercially prepared orchid mixes are suitable. Again the mixture should be open to give the drainage required. A good indicator is to water the pot and watch the immediate reaction of the water escaping through the holes at the bottom of the pot. Also make sure that the pot is off the ground so that it can be flushed out.

*Watering:* During the spring to autumn periods, they require lots of water. So water at least twice a week. Preferred time is early morning or late night. Never water during the heat of the day. Remember these orchids are also known tree dwellers and do not like their roots water logged. Zygopetalums are prone to black spot caused by cold wet winter conditions, so avoid all overhead watering during winter.

*Fertilising:* Apply a fertilizer at least once a week. Fertilisers such as Aquasol T or NitrSol T can be used. Fertilising should be used in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. Better to apply a weaker solution. The flowering period is between autumn and spring. Switch to a blossom booster type fertilizer to encourage the flowering process. An all round fertiliser can be also considered.

*Repotting:* Repotting should be done after the flowering. Repotting can be either a time to divide the plant or move it into a larger pot. It is the time to tidy up the plant and take away old backbulbs. Backbulbs are ones that have contributed towards the flowering process and a source of food storage. Too many backbulbs actually hindered the plant because instead of concentrating on the new growth towards flowering, the plant tends to continue the storage process in the bulbs. Backbulbs are the ones that usually look green without leaves.

*Position:* I have left the most important to last. Zygopetalums need a good location with plenty of sunlight and airflow. Direct sunlight in hot summer days should be avoided. Indicators are the leaves are yellowish from too much sunlight. Shadecloth coverage of 50% to 70% is ideal. Winter time is when increased sunlight is required. WATCH OUT FOR FROST. Frost can destroy young flower spikes. Consider some protection. Suggestion is a north east brick wall - under a carport could also be considered.

*Pests:* Most common pest experienced with Zygopetalums growers are snails and grubs of cabbage white butterfly and cabbage moth. These pests cause damage to the young buds of the flowers. Sprinkle snail

bait around your plants, especially after rain as these pests are most active. Cabbage grubs can be eradicated with either House and Garden T spray or a Hortico T cabbage dust.

*Diseases:* Zygopetalums are subject to black fungal spots on the leaves. This is a harmless fungus spotting and will not damage the plant. Control spray with Mancozeb T . Refer back to the watering section.