

## Australian Native Orchids

Native orchids can be found in all states of Australia. In NSW alone, there are some 18 species of *Dendrobium*, 10 species of *Sarcochilus* and a range other genera, including numerous terrestrial species to be found growing naturally.

Strong interest in hybridisation has increased the varieties of Native Orchid grown by 100's, possibly 1000's and the range of colour, size and shape is now quite phenomenal. The advent of orchid societies specifically dedicated to native orchids is proof of the growing popularity of these usually easily-grown groups. See contact details for the Australian Native Orchid Society (ANOS).



*Dendrobium* Avril's Gold 'Plenty'

One example of the many fine clones from this very successful cross



*Dendrobium speciosum* 'Karen'

Fine specimen of this lovely species which grows in exposed areas along the eastern coast of NSW



*Sarco.* Ginger x Snowheart



*Sarco.* Nicky x Fitzhart

## **Australian Native Orchid Culture**

### **Environment**

Native epiphytic or lithophytic orchids are found growing naturally in most of the moist humid areas on the east coast of Australia so it is relatively easy to provide suitable conditions for growing these species and their hybrids. Of the two most popular genera, dendrobiums prefer bright filtered light, 50%-70% shade cloth being ideal otherwise a tree or similar screen allowing dappled sunlight will suffice. Sarcophilus are usually found in more heavily shaded areas, so up to 90% shade and somewhat cooler and more humid conditions than for dendrobiums is generally preferred.

### **Temperature**

New South Wales coastal temperatures are usually fine for native orchids. Good air movement is important for most kinds, especially during the hottest or coldest periods. Natural airflow should not be impeded. Sarcophilus tolerate temperatures up to 30 degrees. Providing more shade and air movement whilst maintaining humidity by damping down the growing area when the temperature exceeds this will allow them to maintain health through the worst of summer. Protect against frost during winter by giving them some overhead protection.

### **Watering**

Perfect drainage is important as many Australian Native Orchids grow on trees or rocks and dry off quickly after rain. Water thoroughly then allow plants to dry out completely before rewatering. Water regularly in summer during active growth and sparingly in winter when the plants are at rest. If you receive regular winter rain, a solid roof over plants may be necessary to prevent over-watering in the cold conditions.

### **Compost**

The growing media be free draining whilst slightly retentive of moisture. A coarse bark mix is ideal, add perhaps 20% gravel or similar if you wish. The heavier media lends some weight and stability when growing in pots. As a guide, use 10mm bark in 100mm pots, 15mm bark in 150mm pots and 20mm bark in 200mm pots or bigger. If established in the garden, a gravel bed under the plant will help with drainage, or attach firmly to a tree or rock and tie a pad of coconut fibre or similar over the root mass.

### **Repotting**

Dendrobiums are best done soon after flowering, at the beginning of the growing season. We leave Sarcophilus till March/April after the worst of the hot weather has past. Sarc's grow all year, but experience most growth during Autumn/ winter. Ensure pots have adequate drainage and are just big enough to contain the root system of the plant to be potted.

### **Fertilise**

Regularly, especially during the growing season, using a fertiliser for flowering plants, i.e. low in nitrogen and high in potassium.

### **Pests and Diseases**

Scale, aphid or spider mite can sometimes attack hardy and resilient, Australian Native Dendrobiums and Sarcophilus. Treat with a recommended insecticide such as Diazinon or Pest Oil. Fungal infections are rare provided good air movement is maintained during wet weather.