



The term 'sarco' is commonly used to refer to a group of genera including Sarcocochilus, Plectorrhiza, Rhinerrhiza, Parasarcocochilus, Schistostylis, Peristanthus etc. (all cool growers) and even Phalaenopsis (namely amabilis, the only native and definitely a warm grower). It is also used to refer to an ever increasing number of hybrids both within and between these groups. The use of this term is often incorrect.

### **Growing Conditions**

They are grown in a shadehouse. I use one layer of 70% shade cloth in winter (maybe Easter to the October long weekend) for the rest of the year two layers of 70% are used. Under my benches is a layer of pinebark while the walkways are made of river pebbles and on hot days these are hosed down to moderate temperature and increase humidity. Some protection from westerly winds may prove beneficial.

### **Mixes**

I have been using the same for Sarco's and Dens - 80% treated pine bark, medium to coarse grade (or a mix of the two) and 20% river pebbles of a similar size to the bark.

Over the last twelve months I have been using cocomulch as a substitute for pine bark as the quality of the bark has decreased and price has escalated. A recent trip to Melbourne revealed that many growers were already converted to a variety of cocopeat products many of which were readily available at show sales stalls. An internet search of 'orchids + cocopeat' revealed that cocopeat is widely used by U.S. orchid nurseries and so I began experimenting. For sarc.s I use cocomulch - a chunky mix of coconut husk pieces which I soak, flush and sieve out the fines. I have combined this in various ratios the following: River pebbles; "Maidenwell Stone"; Perlite (coarser grades); Coarse pinebark and Styrofoam chips

Although I have made some mistakes which mostly relate to overwatering all experimental mixes seem to be growing well over the short term but the long term success will be the true test.

### **Pots and Mounts**

- Pots: Plastic squat pots, well drained, are my preference. Watch out for fat juicy roots or pebbles blocking your drainage! Terracotta pots are also very good.
- Mounts: Some species prefer to be mounted (usually Sarco. falcatus, weinthalii, Plecto. tridentata. Rhiner. divitiflora) and there are endless possibilities that will suit them. Try some of the following - red cedar, melaleuca branches, treefern slabs, cork, aged fence palings, bagasse or gutterguard pouches filled with bark. You should not overlook tying some to live trees in your garden.

### **Fertilising**

As for all other natives - little and often - but as sarco's grow year round and especially in autumn. Winter fertilising should be maintained. I often forget to fertilise in winter so now I apply a top-dressing of a slow release fertiliser as they are repotted in autumn. I also lime all of my plants in spring and autumn with superfine lime at one gram per litre (agitate to keep it in suspension).

Most fertilisers are suitable and the following have been used with little problem - Aquasol, Nitrosol, fish emulsion, Campbells, Phostrogen, Peters, HSO 8, Nutricote and similar products. A little extra Epsom Salts and iron chelates occasionally does no harm. It is always a good idea to alternate between brands and always water at least once between applications of fertiliser. I have recently come to the conclusion that it is imperative to use some organic fertiliser.



I have recently begun to top dress all repotted plants with blood and bone plus dolomite lime (50:50 in a big salt shaker) and a good drink of Seasol.

If you have time to frequently mist the leaves with a weak fertiliser solution then you will be rewarded with fantastic fat, glossy leaves.

### **Repotting**

This can be done anytime but avoid the hottest and coldest periods, autumn seems to be the best. They like fresh mix and should be repotted at least every two years. A drench with Seasol immediately after potting seems to eliminate transplant shock.

### **Watering**

Sarco.'s have no psuedobulbs and so cannot withstand long periods without water. They are surprisingly resilient due to their thick leaves and fleshy roots which enable them to survive short dry spells and watering routines should reflect this. Lack of water is less critical if high levels of humidity are maintained.

*S. ceciliae* has its own requirements preferring to be grown a little on the dry side. I used to grow them in terra cotta pots under cover and give them a good drenching then allow them to dry out.

If you decide to try cocomulch then be careful with your watering and do not push the potting mix into the pots too firmly - its very different to the open pinebark mixes most of us have been using.

### **Pests**

Sarco's have no particular problems in this area except for *S. ceciliae* which occasionally becomes infested with scale. I prefer to scratch them off and keep the ants at bay as much as possible. White oil the recommended treatment should be used with caution or you can do what I did - stop growing them!

