

Culture of Soft Cane Dendrobiums



Soft cane dendrobiums originated from Asia. They are part of the very large Dendrobium genus and are a little different to most peoples' idea of orchids. Every year they produce new "canes", between 40-100 cm long, with alternating pale green leaves. The flowers are generally produced on the previous year's leafless canes, although the latest breeding has produced plants that flower on the current cane. Why these orchids are so popular then becomes immediately obvious. Their colour ranges from pure white to yellow, pale pink to purple, all depending on their parentage. Often the lip is a deep purple with shading to paler petals. The effect is very attractive. Clever crossing of orchids has increased the colour range and Sydney has an ideal climate for them.

Soft cane dendrobiums will grow happily in most back yards. They need to be potted in a mixture of treated pine bark or orchid mix. The mix needs to be rapidly draining or the roots will not grow and they like to dry out between waterings. This does not harm the plants at all and in fact they seem to thrive on neglect. For feeding they need half-strength fertiliser every one to two weeks; any fertiliser will do. In winter, watering and feeding should be decreased or ceased depending on their situation. Older hybrids tend to produce plantlets instead of flowers if over watered in winter. As with most orchids they should be watered frequently when in active growth or in flower and much less when dormant.

Light is important to induce flowering but preferably filtered light in summer so the foliage does not burn. Under trees or open bushes is ideal and the plants grow very well in hanging pots where there is good air movement. They can also be grown in a shade house under 50% shade cloth. Once the plants are in bud, move them to a sheltered area such as a veranda to keep rain off the buds. Water sitting on the buds can induce fungus with spotting or even bud drop. Good results have been achieved by hanging the plants on eastern facing fences and the clothes lines.

They also grow very well on host trees (trees that don't shed their bark). Softcane Dendrobiums make ideal landscaping plants in the Sydney area particularly in the frost free areas.

Large plants can have hundred of flowers every year and survive for many years with a minimum of care. These orchids are readily available from orchid nurseries or through societies. Several Australian nurseries are amongst the world leaders in their culture.