

# Australian Native Orchids

## Cool Growing Australian Native Orchids in the Toowoomba Area

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The most popular cool growing Australian native orchids are Dendrobiums or Sarcophilus. Both can be grown under similar conditions however Sarcophilus require more shade than Dendrobiums.

### *Dendrobiums*

Dendrobiums are found in most areas on the east coast of Australia with many species growing in the wild on trees and rocks around Toowoomba. It is not difficult therefore to provide suitable growing conditions.

### **Light**

Dendrobiums prefer bright filtered shade. Shade cloth of about 70 % would be ideal in bush house conditions but under a tree in the garden would be equally suitable provided there is not too much hot afternoon sun.

### **Water**

In the wild they get what nature provides which in this area is quite a deal of moisture in summer tapering off through winter. They definitely prefer a cool off after a hot afternoon and probably should be watered 3 times a week through summer and once a week in winter. Spring and autumn periods should see enough water to see the compost moist but not remain wet for too long.

### **Air Movement**

Good fresh air movement is essential at all times bearing in mind where they are found in nature.

### **Potting Mix**

As mentioned earlier they grow on trees and rocks so good drainage is essential but also in nature they may have their roots in moss or leaf litter retaining some moisture. Materials like bark, charcoal, perlite and coconut husk chips have all been used successfully as have mixtures of several or all. Provided there is good drainage with some moisture retention. Dendrobiums can easily be naturalised onto the bark of a tree in the garden and soon become established.

Dendrobiums should be repotted after flowering at the start of the growing season. Repotting only needs to be carried out if the plant has outgrown the pot or the potting mix has broken down and become soggy.

### **Fertiliser**

During the growing period of spring and summer fertiliser should be applied weekly at about half recommended strength. This can be reduced to fortnightly or even monthly as growth slows. It is important to grow fat healthy bulbs this growing season as they will reward you with more flowers later in the year.

### **Pests and Diseases**

Australian Dendrobiums are fairly disease resistant provided they are given good growing conditions and fresh air. Fungal infections are rare and usually only minor. Pests include scale, aphids & spider mite which should be dealt with using the recommended insecticide. Dendrobium beetles can be a real problem in some collections and vigilance is required. The beetles can be removed by hand or sprayed with Carbaryl or other insecticides.

## ***Sarcochilus***

While Dendrobiums are light lovers Sarcochilus enjoy shadier, cooler more humid conditions being found in nature in the cooler mountainous areas and then in gullies and ravines.

### **Light**

Where Dendrobiums thrive in 50 to 70% shade, Sarcochilus prefer closer to 90% shade. In bush house conditions another layer of 70% shade cloth over one area will allow the successful cultivation of these little beauties.

### **Water**

Sarcochilus in nature are subjected not only to good rainfall but heavy mists and fog; therefore they prefer to be grown moister than Dendrobiums. The plants are continually growing so benefit from regular watering.

### **Air Movement**

They like constant air movement and detest stuffy conditions. They prefer cooler conditions than Dendrobiums and benefit from a cool breeze and a light misting regularly in hot weather.

### **Potting Mix**

Sarcochilus like Dendrobiums grow naturally on trees or rocky faces but they definitely like a bit more moisture. Having said that, they still need good drainage and a similar mix to Dendrobiums would be satisfactory.

### **Fertiliser**

A soluble fertiliser low in nitrogen and higher in potassium will give more robust plants and better flowers. The plants often have a growth period in autumn and winter and this time of year should not be forgotten in fertilising. A quarter to half recommended concentration is a good place to start and should be carried out weekly to fortnightly.

### *Good Growing*

***Disclaimer: These notes are supplied in good faith and Toowoomba Orchid Society Inc and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.***

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