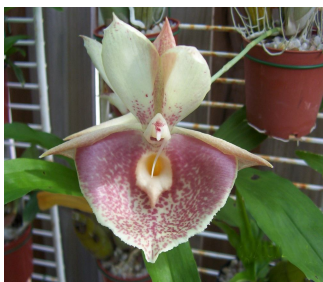


## Catasetum Orchids



There are over 100 species in this most interesting genus of deciduous plants. They are also unusual in that some species have perfect flowers while others have separate spikes of male and female flowers. The two sexes may be borne at different seasons of the year on the same plant. As a matter of fact, some plants in collections have been known to produce only male flowers year after year. When the genus was first described in 1822, two Greek words were used to form the generic name, "kata" and "seta".

Ctism Orchidglade 'David Rogers'

Vegetatively these sympodial, epiphytic plants are very much alike. The usually spindle-shaped pseudobulbs may be as much as 18 inches long and 5 inches in diameter. As the new pseudobulb develops, it is enclosed by up to 8 large, soft, lance-like, pleated leaves. After the pseudobulbs are mature, the leaf blades fall off. The inflorescence arises from the base of the pseudobulb. The basic flower colour is green to greenish yellow with some maroon and deep red.

The Catasetum orchids are confined chiefly to Central America. The plants characterized by short, stout, usually pointed pseudobulbs, and the freedom with which aerial roots are produced. Usually the spikes are produced from the base of the mature bulb or young growth. The flowers are among the most remarkable in the orchid family. Apart from their wonderful structure, the male and female flowers, which differ both in structure and colour, are usually carried on distinct spikes. Hence much confusion was caused through insufficient material in the early days and even now though a large number have been described, the clarity is doubtful. Originally three genera were created, Monocanthus, Myanthus and Catasetum, in the Orchid review of 1895 shows their identity, reducing them to male and female and retaining the name "Catasetum".

The male flowers are the more interesting and are produced more freely than the female. Not content with the devious methods used by other orchids to ensure pollination, the members of the Catasetum tribe use a more direct approach; they shoot the pollinia directly at the visiting insect. Each kind has a trigger placed in such away the insect is bound step on it or disturb it in some way. The instant this happens the pollinarium is shot out; the viscid disc flips up, hits the insect, and adheres tightly to its anatomy. The creamy material on the disc is so copious that it actually splatters on contact; precluding any possibility of failure to stick to a hairy surface, and it sets instantly. The disk shortly contracts, in many species bringing the pollen masses into correct position for attachment to the stigma.

To attract the proper insect, the flowers exude a potent fragrance, not always detectable to the human nose. The fragrance is not associated with nectar, but is bound in tissues upon which the bee scratches. The tissue is so placed in the flower, at same part of the lip, that the bee in its activity must touch the trigger.

So sensitive is the trigger apparatus that it makes it difficult to handle some of these flowers without causing the pollinarium to pop. You can cause it to do so by touching the trigger with your finger or a pencil, and can feel the recoil of the flower as this happens.

In addition to being fascinating performers, the flowers are in most cases very beautiful, and those that cannot be called exactly pretty have a certain lurid appeal. Most of them bloom during fall and winter, but a few wait until spring. They are all deciduous, and with a few exceptions flower while the leaves are falling, or some time after this has taken place.



Ctism Orchidglade 'Orchidglade II'

The majority of Catasetums come from the tropics of America and requires a warm moist atmosphere when growing. Many produce aerial roots in abundance and such plants are

susceptible to over watering. Care with water is essential to all and all benefited by a long rest in a bright position. It is best to keep the plants dry from leaf fall until new growth begins in the spring, giving occasional water to keep the bulbs plump, once in awhile in the pot but mostly by misting. They should be repotted when the roots start from the new growth in the spring, and then be watered regularly.

The plants are better cultivated in small pots or baskets and hung in a position that gives the most light. Compost used for Cattleyas is most suitable. Moisture should not be allowed to rest in the young growths, careful watering is required until the leaves are fully developed.



Catasetum plants should be transplanted in spring just before the start of new growth. After transplanting Catasetums must be watered very carefully as the new forming bracts are very sensitive to moisture.

Throughout the vegetation period plants are placed in a hot position with plenty of light. When plants are well rooted they can be watered abundantly. After flowering they can be given less water. When leaves turn yellow watering should stop and plants transferred to cool environment.

Ctsm Orchidglade 'Argyle Pink'

Compost - chopped sphagnum moss and sand in equal portions. No watered should be applied until growth has fairly well commenced.

Culture Notes by Kev Dodt (Gympie)

These notes have been used at our Cultural and New Grower's Meetings. They are from various sources and we thank the authors. All articles are supplied in good faith and the Bribie Island Orchid Society and its members will not be held responsible for any loss or damage.