

## **AUTUMN**

I find the fall to be a good time of year to catch up on all those jobs that I was too busy to get through during the summer although many Australian natives either in flower or about to open but more about them later when I come to that section. I have started tidying up in the houses, cleaning the potting benches, sorting the pots and sterilizing the equipment and getting ready for the winter winds, but on to the different categories.

### **AUSTRALIAN NATIVES**

Autumn sees the first flowers of some of our terrestrial orchids such as *Acanthus*, *Corybas* and *Pterostylis*. These beautiful little orchids are a field of study just in themselves but are sadly overlooked by growers due to their very different growing requirements but are well worth perusing if looking for that something different. Many species are easy to grow and have been in cultivation ever since I was a boy and by now you have some idea that was a while ago but I do remember a few dedicated members of the Gosford Orchid Society bringing in the odd specimen at a monthly meeting, probably "hoods" or something similar but certainly of great interest. There are specialist nurserymen that have offerings from time to time but enquire first from experienced growers before buying tubers.

Clean up your pots of dendrobiums removing dead leaves and bulbs, with bulbs dead means dead, not leafless, as I have had many a plant of *gracilicaule*, *kingianum*, *falcorostrum* or even *speciosum* produce blooms.

This is not the time to be repotting your Australian dendrobiums, even if they are pot bound, much better to wait until spring once they have come out of their dormancy and their roots are ready to be on the move again.

### **CATTLEYAS**

These and their close relatives can do with a boost of a fertiliser high in nitrogen to get those new growths on the move, make sure they do not dry out entirely, a trap that is easy to fall into at this time of year with cooler days and the odd shower it is easy to develop the mind set that they have had sufficient, but with new growths developing and roots on the look out for moisture and nourishment, this is not the case. When the need for watering arises soak them fully and fertilise weekly. This is a good time to divide over-crowded pots and be on the look out for tiny snails and slugs that may have been lurking in your stored mix and treat accordingly along with any infestations of scale that appear at this time of year.

### **CYMBIDIUMS**

These are coming into their peak flowering season and in fact many of my miniatures, practically those with "Sarah Jean" in their parentage are finished for another year. Many plants new growths are still developing. Now is the time to be busy with your cymbidium collection removing dead leaves and the remains of old leaves or dehusking older bulbs as these are a harbour for snails and have them come out and find those developing spikes before you do. Remove any weeds and turn your pots so that spikes develop a straight, upward habit rather than twisting around for the sun. At this time of year I like to top-dress my plants with a dry mix of equal parts blood and bone and sulphate of potash and water in with an application of Seasol. Watering should only be carried out when the mix starts to appear a little dry. Should you experience above average rainfall, and this seems to be the case in many parts it may be a good preventive measure to give all your plants a good drenching of ANTI-ROT or FONGA1UD at the rate recommended on the packet and repeat every two weeks whilst the rainy weather is about to guard against bulb and root rot, these can even be applied whilst it is raining, it is also a good idea to incorporate a wetting agent to improve the absorption. Also be on the lookout for spider mites under the foliage and treat with white oil or eco-oil as a safe method of control.

I like to pot up young seedlings now so they are established before the summer heat and after potting give a good soaking with a mix of liquid seaweed and fish emulsion. I also give a monthly application of sulphate of magnesium or "Epsom Salts" as it is commonly known; I use this on all my seedlings. Start staking spikes once they are long enough.

### **DENDROBIUMS**

Many hard cane Dendrobiums are now starting to put on a fabulous display along with their close relatives the *Bulbophyllum* species as many have the same needs as far as conditions and culture are concerned.

This is not a good time to re-pot most forms unless living in the tropics as root growth would have come to a stand still, even if you think it is an emergency it is like the emergency rooms in most of our hospitals, you are best prepared to wait a while as they will not be able to get their roots on the move through the new mix until mid to late spring and in the mean time you are likely to lose the

plant from root rot.

Move your watering time over to mornings so that the plant has had time to soak it in and the media is not soaking wet going into the evening cold.

Soft-cane orchids should be given as much light as possible to encourage bud development and continue watering, enough to ensure the media does not dry out entirely otherwise the bulbs will shrivel and you could also suffer buds wilting.

## **PAPHIOPEDILUM**

As the days become cooler buds should be starting to appear everywhere in your slipper orchid collection and you need to maintain regular watering and fertilising and never ever let your plants dry out as being without bulbs they have no reserves in storage. Water as early in the day as possible and avoid watering on rainy days, the plan is to retain moisture in the potting mix but not a sodden pot of slush, even fresh material breaks down fairly rapidly.

Let in more light onto your collection, this should be done by mid autumn. Many whites do not like cold conditions and need warmth or your sunniest, sheltered spot in your shade house.

As a general rule of thumb your white Paphiopedilums will flower first, followed by the greens, then the reds and then your autumn tones followed finally by the spotted varieties late into the year.

However modern paphs with their mixed ancestry often are miles apart from this rule.

If it is your intention to grow Paphiopedilums for showing it is important to take charge of your bud as soon as it emerges as it is important to have upright, straight stems and this is best achieved by keeping the stem upright and in good light right from the start. Be on the look out for buds being trapped under leaves and act accordingly.

Staking spikes is usually not necessary if grown in good, regular light and facing the sun for most of the day. Put out plenty of bait for slugs and snails, as they have no conscience when it comes to making a meal out of a juicy bud.

A flower is much more likely to get the judge's attention if it is a little cheeky and catches their eye rather than being modest and gazes at the bench, this can be achieved by training the flower to look slightly upward by allowing to open with the stem at an angle forward of about fifteen degrees by tilting the pot and this should be done as the bud is about to open and kept that way until the flower is fully opened, remember judges do not take kindly to tape, wire etc., and will deduct points when detected.

## **ONCIDIUM**

Most of the Oncidium alliance have come to the end of their flowering season and now is a good time to clean up the plants removing old flower canes, and dead bulbs and foliage. Those plants that need repotting do so as they do not really have a dormant period and therefore root growth will establish the plant fairly quickly in the new media.

Water every few days and fertilise weekly to continue to maintain strong, healthy bulbs and keep an eye out for mites on the underside of leaves and spray with pyrethrum.

## **PHALAENOPSIS**

Many plants may have signs of mealy bug and scale on the plants and once they have invaded the shade house it takes a major effort to eradicate them, sometimes years as they seem to have a knack of hiding and come out when you have moved on. I always opt for personal safety so spray with white oil or eco-oil, but only on cooler days.

With all the humidity bacterial spots seem to occur from time to time and I make up a solution of fifteen grams of Condy's Crystals to twenty litres of water and spray on.

Plants still need regular feeding and I prefer seaweed and fish emulsion mix and this will help to strengthen tissue in the roots and foliage to get them through winter.

## **VANDACEOUS**

As always throughout the year never let your plants dry out, if plants are growing in wooden baskets or clay pots without a potting mix you need to water well every morning, exactly as they would in the wild, high up in trees in the rain forest. A light misting in the mid afternoon is also of benefit. If plants are in a potting mix then water every second or third day but do not allow to dry out.

Continue to fertilise weekly, mixing it up from time to time and maintain vigilance for aphid, scale and other insects and treat with pyrethrum.

Please note that neither Bribie Island Orchid Society nor the writer take any responsibility for any recommendations given or expressed, they should be used as a guide and adjusted to your own local conditions.

John Atkins