

Maxillaria Orchids



A genus widely distributed throughout Central America; from Brazil to the West Indies. The 200 species vary greatly *sanderiana* and *grandiflora* are representative of those which have short rhizomes and clustering pseudobulbs. Another species of which *tenuifolia* is typical, has pseudobulbs borne at short intervals on long, scandent, or ascending rhizomes.

Maxillaria tenuifolia

The culture of Maxillarias is very similar to that given to Lycastes. The plants should be kept moist all year round and be shaded rather heavily during sunny weather. The plants with scandent rhizomes are better placed on blocks of wood or pieces of tree fern. Attention must be given to the airing should a black spot appear on the foliage. This is usually due to stagnant moisture.

In a manner common to most epiphytes, Maxillaria species have their own particular host trees and some will be found only on that type of tree and no other. Lithophytes should not be regarded as any different and may grow on only one type of rock surface. It is little wonder when taken into common cultivation that some of the species will thrive where others languish.

Although this genus has captured the attention of many orchid growers, it has not achieved the heights of popularity reached by genera such as *Cattleya* and *Masdevallia*. All species of Maxillaria are evergreen, most with prominent clustered pseudobulbs.

With such a large genus it is difficult to generalise as to cultivation practices. However, it can be safely stated that the majority of species tried, have proved to be easy and rewarding subjects to grow. Clumping species are generally grown in pots whereas those with a creeping habit can be grown in hanging pots or baskets.

In cultivation they should be treated as epiphytes; some pot-grown, some in wire baskets and slat baskets. Most of the genus prefers to grow into large undisturbed plants and small propagations are always slow to get away and make up into flowering specimens. Potting material may vary according to cultivation, but generally should be based on bark mixes which will withstand drying out. The rest periods vary greatly. Some require as long as six months but others may be in continual growth and flowering phases throughout the year. The root systems of most plants are a little more permanent than some epiphytes and surface growth rather than immersion in potting mixes seems to suit them. This leads to cork, tree fern or tree branches.

Fertilizers for this genus may be a little different from those applied to other epiphytes. If liquids are used they should be very weak applications in the later growth stages and stopped as the pseudobulbs reach maturity. Plants mounted on cork slabs or any other type of mount should be immersed in a bucket of water containing one small teaspoon of Aquasol or similar fertilizer for a couple of minutes once a week or less frequently. All sorts of variations may be thought up but the plants will suffer from over fertilizing just as much as from too little. If the roots are destroyed for any reason the rehabilitation of Maxillarias may take from two to three years and result in loss of most of the leaves. Any potting mix should be capable of retaining a little moisture, but all excess water should be able to run freely from the pot almost as soon as applied.

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