

## Soft Cane Dendrobium Orchids



Den nobile

These Nobile type Dendrobiums were first discovered at the foot of the Himalayas in Northern India, and taken back to England for hybridising some 160 years ago. Many English hybridisers produced finer quality blooms and better colours from 1849 up to the present day, and many of their hybrids are still seen on the showbenches today. eg. Ainsworthii (the first hybrid), Thwaitisiae veitch's var., Lady Coleman, Gatton Monarch, Merliu, Milady Montrose and Winifred Fortescue etc.

Then Haus Wickman from West Germany produced the very popular Anne Marie in 1963. Many clones of this famous hybrid won prizes worldwide. Jiro Yamamoto, possibly the best known of the Japanese breeders started in 1960 and is still producing many fine showbench clones in whites, lavenders and yellows, such as Yukidaruma 'King', White Pearl, many Malones varieties, and yellows Ribbon Delight, and Golden Blossom 'Kogane' etc. Use of the Japanese miniature species moniliforme as a parent has produced a large number of miniature, very free flowering hybrids of different colours both for the showbench and the pot plant trade. Now many Australian hybridisers have taken up the challenge and produced fine quality softcanes in a wide variety of colours.

In their natural habitat, soft canes are subject to monsoon rain in their summer growing season, and a cold dry winter. They are ideally suited to our temperate climate region of the Northern Rivers of New South Wales and South East Queensland.

Plants flower in September in a normal growing season. However a warmer than usual winter can produce an early start to flowering in August and usually a poorer flowering with only a few blooms on the top of each cane. Excessive dull cloudy weather in the middle of their summer growing season can cause a late start to flowering (end of September and even October).

### **POTS & COMPOST:**

At our nursery we achieved best results from adult plants in a squat plastic pot in a fairly fine bark/charcoal mix with added perlite and vermiculite (Paph mix) (about 3/8 inch grade). Only about 20% good hardwood charcoal of the same grade is used. CL We use a size of pot that will hold the plant for about 5 years. Smaller plants are potted into 3 inch square pots in a bark/charcoal mix of about 1/4 inch to 3/8 inch grade. Cymbidium mix can be used and the short term results can be good as long as watering is controlled to suit the mix. The disadvantage is its short life before breakdown, usually only 2 years before repotting is necessary.



Den Dawn Maree

### **SHADE:**

Established plants need about 50% to 60% in the summer growing season but only 30% shade to full sun during winter. It is essential these plants be given enough sun as they grow by photosynthesis. Too little sun and they do not absorb all the necessary elements of fertiliser particularly the potash which produces plant sugars and eventually flowers. Too much shade causes the plants to grow soft and green, needing constant attention by staking and in that form are more susceptible to disease and pests.

### **STAKES:**

Stakes for softcanes should be of better quality hardwood or some other long lasting material as the canes can be very plump at the top, but very thin at the base.

### **WATERING:**

During the summer growing season we give these plants a good soaking, then wait until the compost is just dry before watering again. Keeping the compost wet continually gives fungus and bacteria ideal conditions to grow.

### **FERTILISING:**



Softcane new growths are usually evident at flowering time but fertilising is not commenced until after flowering. It is advisable to discourage the new growths if possible until after flowering as the plant can put too much energy into new growth to the detriment of flowering. After flowering we use a high nitrogen fertiliser such as AQUAFEED which is totally soluble and contains chelated trace elements, to boost the new growth for about 4 weeks or until it gets too soft. For any plants that have not produced a new growth by flowering add some growth hormone such as ROOTEX.L.,

and Vitamin B complex, plus a little sugar to encourage the eyes to start growth. After about 4 weeks of high nitrogen or even before, when growths get too soft, change over to a high potash formula such as AQUA-K and growths will harden up as long as the plants are getting enough sunlight. Continue with this formulation until the cane has just completed its growth. Then if you desire really top quality showbenched blooms, fertilise with a very high potash formula (Flower Booster HP8) to fill the canes full of sugars for flower production. The flowers are produced from these sugars so as flowering proceeds the canes will shrivel slightly. We fertilised all plants in our nursery with these three formulas at the rate of 1 level teaspoon to 5 litres of water each week in summer, and every 3 or 4 weeks in winter depending on weather conditions. We stop fertilising softcanes about 1st May and certainly before new growths start. It is essential to use a horticultural wetting agent when fertilising as with all sprays to wet the plant totally, and allow the fertiliser to be absorbed into the compost, so the plants are fertilised continually (a wetting agent is a non-ionic HORTICULTURAL DETERGENT and is used at about 1/2ml to one litre of solution.) (DO NOT USE HOUSEHOLD DETERGENTS).

### **INSECTS:**

We use DIAZINON as a general purpose insecticide.

For snails use Baysol pellets or spray.

For Mites use Kelthane, but be sure to spray **under** leaves.

For Fungal spotting use Mancozeb and after treatment, REMOVE THE CAUSE to prevent a recurrence of the problem.

Usually better ventilation, or more sun, or less water, or all of these will fix the fungal problem.

Spraying with a sanitiser such as Benzal Konium Chloride can help also by killing the spores. Also ultra violet from the sun can be valuable in combating this disease.

For scale use Clear White Oil, repeated in two weeks. If persistent, add Rogor to the white oil.

Make sure you have not got a reservoir of scale on trees like citrus in your yard or a neighbours.

### **REPOTTING:**

Should be done immediately after flowering is finished. By then the new growths should be between 1 inch and 6 inches high and just starting to produce new roots from the base. Tip the plant out of the pot and inspect the root system for insect damage and rot. If either is evident take steps to prevent a recurrence of any problems. Rot is caused by lack of airflow through the compost, or too much water or the compost has broken down. If ants or cockroaches are found in the pot, dip all pots in the bush house about half way into a solution of Ant, Spider and Cockroach Killer. Cut off the back canes but leave at least two canes plus the new growth for repotting.



**BACK CANES:**

Cut off all roots, break them into single canes and soak them in a Mancozeb solution for 5 minutes. Then apply a thick paste of Mancozeb to all the cuts and breaks to prevent disease entering the plant. Tie a label onto each cane and place them upright into an empty terracotta pot, and place in a cool shady place where it will not be watered too much until aerial growths grow. The terracotta pot absorbs moisture from the air and provides a moist microclimate in which the dormant eyes will grow. (A plant does not need compost until it has actively growing roots i.e. with green tips). Pot these aerals up when new roots are just starting to show on their second growth.

**LEADING GROWTHS:**

Inspect the cut on the rhizome. It should be a creamy green colour. If it has a black or brown spot in it, cut back further to eliminate this, then soak in a solution of Mancozeb for 5 minutes, and treat the cut with a thick paste of Mancozeb, to seal it and prevent the entry of disease. Choose a size pot that will suit the plant for a further 5 years growth. Put about 2 inches of coolite cubes in the base of the pot for drainage. Hold the plant in the pot with the rhizome cut against the edge of the pot, spread the roots out then pour the compost around the root system. Tap the side of the pot to consolidate (DO NOT press the compost down as this will damage roots). Top up the compost until it is about 1/2 inch below the top of the pot. Remember only the roots should go into the compost, do not bury the base eyes or they will rot. Stake the plant with as many



stakes as necessary to stabilise the plant. Write two new labels (don't use the old brittle ones), place one right down the side of the pot well below the compost so the grandchildren can't find it, then place the other in the front of the pot so it can be read without removal or tie it onto the plant. If you lose one label you still know what the plant is next time you pot. Place the newly potted plant in a shady cool spot but DO NOT WATER until you are sure the root system is quite dry and the Mancozeb has dried and sealed up all the damage done to the plant. Then gradually start watering and fertilising the plant, and when you can see it actively growing ease it out into about 70% shade and then into 50% shade with the rest of your adult plants.

Den Sanders Festival

**AERIALS:**

On established plants are best taken off and potted up when they are making their second growth from the base, and just commencing new root growth.

**FLOWERING:**

When buds are evident, protect from rain and heavy dew, especially the whites which spot very easily. Spray around the benches with a sanitiser such as Benzal-Konium Chloride to destroy fungal spores and reduce watering to just enough to prevent dehydration (pot water only). Blooms are produced by the sugars in the canes that you put there by using the high potash fertiliser and extra sun during the hardening up process at the end of the growing season. Plants should be placed on the bench so the leading growths are facing north so the blooms will be displayed away from the foliage.

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.