

Rays Growing Guide - Cattleyas

Pronounced KAT-lee-uh, this group of orchids originate from a large area of tropical and sub-tropical America. They occur in many sizes, shapes and colours but are best known for their large flamboyant blooms. Most grow as epiphytes, or air plants. They have large pseudobulbs that are used to store water and have thick, fleshy roots that have the ability to collect moisture from the air.

Light:

Light is important for good flowering. About 50% shade is optimal, however if leaves overheat in summer this may need to be increased to 70% shade. Leaves should be medium green colour and pseudobulbs rigid and erect without staking. Excessive shading will reduce flowering dramatically and lead to soft, floppy growths.

Temperature:

Temperature should range between a minimum of 5-7 degrees Celsius in winter to a maximum of about 30-35 degrees Celsius in summer. Avoid watering if the temperature falls below 10 degrees. Small plants need to be protected from temperature extremes. High day temperatures up to 35 degrees can be tolerated if humidity, air circulation and shading are increased.

Water:

Water can be provided in two ways, in the pot from watering and in the air from humidity. For a plant growing in good open media, watering twice each week in summer and once a week in winter is sufficient. In summer avoid watering during the heat of the day. In winter only water on a bright sunny morning. The root system on these plants can easily be damaged by excess water. If in doubt, defer watering.

Humidity:

Humidity is important to Cattleyas as roots prefer to grow in humid air rather than to be wet. Humidity needs to range from 50% to 80%, with about 60% being ideal. In winter watering can be delayed by wetting the greenhouse floor and circulating air around the plants. This technique can also help to cool the plants in summer. If you live in a southern winter rainfall area, it may be necessary to grow your cattleyas under a solid cover so watering can be controlled.

Fertiliser:

Fertilise with a complete balanced NPK fertiliser for flowering plants. Apply fertiliser with every second watering.

Pots & Medium:

Pots should be shallow, no deeper than they are wide and should have plenty of holes to allow for good drainage. Media needs to be coarse and long lasting. OrchidMate Coconut Husk Chips is ideal. Treated pine bark is also popular. As a guide, use medium grade (10mm) in 100mm pots, large grade (15mm) in 150mm pots, and extra large grade (20mm) in 200mm pots or larger.

Pests & Diseases:

Apart from root rot caused by overwatering, Cattleyas can be attacked by pests such as scale and mealy bug. Check under dead bracts on old bulbs for hidden scale. This is easily controlled by Rogor or Pest Oil. Slugs and snails love fresh root tips, as do cockroaches, so check for these pests if root tips are being damaged. Hanging plants or growing on mesh benches can help, but otherwise snail bait may be necessary.