

Ray's Growing Guide – Dendrobium and Sarcochilus

The popularity of Australian Native Orchids has grown dramatically in recent years. New cultivars have provided growers with a broader range of colours and styles that are easy to grow and flower.

Environment:

Dendrobiums and Sarcochilus are found growing wild in most areas on the east coast of Australia, so if you live there it is easy to provide suitable conditions for them. Dendrobiums prefer bright filtered light with 50%- 70% shade cloth or a tree or similar screen allowing dappled sunlight. Sarcochilus are usually found about 90% shade and prefer somewhat higher humidity than dendrobiums.

Temperature:

New South Wales coastal temperatures are ok. Good air movement is important, especially during very hot or cold periods so natural air flow should not be impeded. Sarcochilus enjoy temperatures up to 30 degrees Celcius but over this try to minimise maximum temperatures by providing more shade or air movement.

Watering:

Perfect drainage is very important. Many Australian native orchids grow on trees and dry off quickly after rain. Water thoroughly then allow plants to dry out completely before watering again. Water regularly in summer and sparingly in winter. If you receive regular winter rain, a solid roof over plants may be necessary to control watering in cold weather.

Compost:

Compost must be free draining. OrchidMate Coconut Husk Chips or treated pine bark is ideal. Some growers like to add 10% coarse perlite, gravel or polystyrene to the mix. As a guide, use medium chips in 100mm pots, large chips in 150mm pots & extra large chips in 200mm pots or bigger. If established in the garden, a gravel bed under the plant will help with drainage. They can also be attached to a tree or rock with a pad of coconut fibre or similar over the root mass.

Repotting:

Dendrobiums are best repotted soon after flowering, at the beginning of the growing season. Sarcochilus can wait until March or April after the worst of the hot weather has passed. Sarcochilus grow all year, but experience the most growth during autumn and winter. Ensure pots have adequate drainage and are just big enough to contain the root system of the plant.

Fertiliser:

Fertilise regularly, especially during the growing season. Use a soluble fertiliser for flowering plants that is low in nitrogen and high in potassium. Plants will benefit from an occasional dusting with Dolomite.

Pests & Disease:

Australian natives are generally hardy and resilient, although they are sometimes be attacked by scale, aphids or spider mites. Treat with a recommended insecticide such as Rogor or Pest Oil. Fungal infections are rare provided good air movement is maintained during wet weather. Use Mancozeb or lime water for leaf infections & Yates Anti Rot will prevent bulb rot. Dendrobium beetle can be a problem during the warmer months. Beetles are easily caught or spray with Carbaryl.