

Ray's Growing Guide - Oncidiums and Softcanes

ONCIDIUMS

This diverse group originates in South America. Some species are tropical, but most prefer sub-tropical or temperate climates. These epiphytic orchids need perfect drainage, so a pot with a free draining mix or a mount such as tree fern slabs or cork bark is ideal. Medium to heavy shade is preferred as many of the softer leaf varieties are susceptible to leaf spotting if given too much light. Include a soluble fertiliser recommended for flowering plants with every second or third watering all year round. Water regularly whilst growth is active, then water sparingly after growth has matured.

SOFTCANE DENDROBIUMS

Softcane, or Nobile-type Dendrobiums grow naturally in Northern India & Thailand at elevations up to 1500 metres in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. These species and their hybrids are hardy and plants that will tolerate temperatures from 3 degrees to the high thirties.

They are easy orchids to grow provided they are given plenty of water and fertiliser in summer, with no nitrogen fertiliser, little water and plenty of light during winter.

To grow softcane dendrobiums well different seasonal treatment is required. After flowering in October increase watering and gradually increase fertiliser. Soluble 'flower-booster' fertiliser at recommended strength is preferred. By November when growths are 100mm or more high, water plants every second day and include fertiliser at least once per week. Maintain this treatment until new growths are nearly mature, until about February or March. Then reduce water and fertiliser so that by April the plants are receiving no nitrogen fertiliser at all. Water sparingly, just enough to prevent bulbs from shrivelling, until plants flower in spring.

Plants should be grown in a well drained medium. Pots should be as small as possible to contain the roots. Repot soon after flowering and before new growth starts to develop roots. Cover the plants with 30-50% shade in summer to prevent burn to new growths. Flowering will be enhanced if plants are given full or near full sun during winter.