



The Orchid Society of W. A. (Inc.)

Paphiopedilum Orchids

Paphiopedilum orchids are more commonly called "paphs" or "slipper orchids". In nature they grow in decaying organic matter, principally in the south east Asian countries. Some plants have a very attractive mottled leaves, and some enthusiasts grow them entirely for these intricate leaf patterns. Flowers vary significantly in shape and colour and can last a long time, four to six weeks even as a cut flower. There are single flowered paphs, and "multifloral" paphs that have several large flowers arranged along the flower spike. They are easy to grow and are very rewarding. The following information is a guide to help you grow paphiopedilum orchids in Perth.

POSITION

Paphs appreciate lower light levels than other orchids (such as cymbidiums or cattleyas) and will burn severely if given direct sun. Aim for light levels similar to those enjoyed by phalaenopsis orchids- the ideal amount of light is achieved when no shadow (or a very faint shadow) is cast. This usually equates to 70-80% shade cloth, or 12,000 to 20,000 lux. Some of the 'multifloral paphs' can tolerate higher light levels if acclimatised to it slowly. Paphs with mottled leaves generally require lower light levels than plain leaf types. They can be grown successfully indoors, near a shaded east or west window. Some paphiopedilums will tolerate getting rained on in a shade house all year, but the majority would benefit from a solid roof (fibreglass, glass or solarweave) to provide some protection from rain in out colder months- if in doubt, ask your local paph experts for advice.

TEMPERATURE

The majority of paphs will grow in Perth in a shade house without heat, although some paphs (in particular mottled leaf varieties) will grow slowly during winter when grown cold compared to the plain leaf types. For best growth, a minimum of 12°C should be aimed for. Cooler temperatures are not detrimental, providing the plants are protected from rain and kept a little drier. Maximum temperatures up to about 30°C will not cause stress to the plant. Higher temperatures can be reduced by increasing shade and ventilation. Plants grown in the house are happy with temperatures humans prefer.

HUMIDITY

Ideal humidity is 50% to 70%. Since paphs have no water storage organs (bulbs), humidity must be closely monitored. Dampening down around the plant is better than misting since it reduces the salt build up on leaves and the chance of lead rot due to water accumulating in the leaf axils.

VENTILATION

All orchids like fresh air. Good air circulation reduces attack from fungi and bacteria and ensures the foliage is dry by nightfall. Ventilation is more of a concern for plants grown in terrariums or indoors.

WATERING

Paphs should be kept moist at all times. This does not mean soaking wet or leaving pots sitting in a saucer of water. Always water in the morning, aiming for the leaves to be dry by nightfall. Enough water should be supplied so it runs out of the bottom of the pot to flush out excess salts. We water our plants daily in the very hot summer, reducing to every third or fourth day during the winter. In spells of cold wet weather, watering can be delayed until the next clear day.

FERTILIZING

Paphs are extremely light feeders. A very small amount of slow-release fertilizer such as Macracote can be added to the potting mix at repotting time, or Strike Back for Orchids liquid at half or quarter strength every fortnight during active growth. Try to avoid fertilizing in the peak of summer, or middle of winter. Never feed a dry plant.

REPOTTING

Paphs appreciate frequent repotting- small plants should be repotted every year, larger plants at least every second year. Avoid repotting in the heat of summer- early spring is an ideal time.

POTTING MIX

Many different types of mixes can be used providing they allow free drainage and possess water retentive properties. Aged pine bark nuggets from an Orchid Society or Orchid Nursery (the small size, 9-12mm chunks) are an ideal medium, +/- additives such as perlite or charcoal, in a ratio of approx 4 parts bark to 1 part perlite, 1 part charcoal. Fresh bark or mulch must never be used- If not weathered, toxic substances will be released, nitrogen will be robbed from the plant to break the bark down, and the plant will dry out excessively due to the new bark not holding moisture. Many paphiopedilum hybrids have species that grow on limestone cliffs in their parentage, and for these plants, many growers will add either dolomite lime, shell grit or crushed eggshells to the mix to help keep the mix from becoming acidic over time.

PESTS AND DISEASES

The only troublesome pest that attacks paphs is the mealy bug, which responds well to insecticides. Bacterial and fungal rots occur if culture is poor, to treat these infections, increase ventilation and reduce watering, remove the diseased parts if possible, and spray with fungicide/bactericide.

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