

# AUSTRALIAN NATIVE DENDROBIUM ORCHIDS

The Genus *Dendrobium* is one of the largest groups of Epiphytes with more than 1,400 species.

Australian native *Dendrobiums* are mainly Epiphytes and Lithophytes with a few Terrestrials. They are mainly found in the Rain Forests clinging or attached to trees or rock faces.

There are approximately 60 Australian Native *Dendrobiums*. Most grow in the Temperate East Coast Region.

The *dendrobiums* are pollinated by small native bees, though some are self pollinated.

Majority of *dendrobium* species and hybrids are grown in Victoria with little difficulty. They can be purchased quite cheaply and will grow easily. Many grow on trees in forests under canopies of leafy trees.

Culture is simple. Small pieces can be tied on to slabs of tree fern or old weathered wood, casuarina logs, or plastic pots with potting mix (bark 5-10mm).

Main varieties of our Native *Dendrobiums* are Epiphytic (growing on trees). Some are Lithophytic (growing in leaf litter on rocks).

Our cultural growing methods should try to copy their natural conditions. New plants can be simply tied on to the host material with fishing line, with moss over the roots. Once the plant is established and the roots are attached, the fishing line can be removed.

Pot Culture: Suitable mix is weathered bark 5-10mm.

When potting or repotting, take off dead roots, but make sure there are still some left alive. Spread roots out into the pot so you do not have a ball of air in the centre which will only rot if the bark is not all the way through the pot. Species which do not like pot culture are *Dendrobium fleckeri*, *Tetragonum*, *Aemulum*, *Adae*, *Striolatum*, *Beckleri*, *Linguaforme* and *Cucumerinum*. These plants are best grown on coarse tree fern slabs or pieces of tree branches. When using pot culture, make sure you leave enough room for plants to grow for a few years before they need re-potting.

*Dendrobiums* seem to grow in clumps and a pot bound specimen will grow its roots outside the pot or even over the surface of the mix. Re-pot when the plant is not bound, or if it is not flowering very well. *Dendrobiums* make a terrific specimen and are best potted with room to grow instead of breaking up the plant.

Potting on is simply moving a plant from one pot to another larger one with the least root disturbance. Use coarse bark at the bottom of the pot for good drainage, then fresh bark mixture to raise the plant to the required level without too much root disturbance.

Watering: *Dendrobiums* have a wet-dry season. They grow under the canopy of trees in forests, some attached to the trees and branches and are generally shaded through summer and given normal light in winter to make them grow and flower.

Nutrition: (Fertilizer) Weak fertilizer (Aquasol 1/4 strength) weekly in the growing season, September through to May-June. When the plant becomes dormant it will not take up fertilizer, so no feeding is necessary. Once the roots re-start, commence feeding.

Heating: Is not necessary except for *Den. Bigibbum* (Cook Town Orchid), *Den. Similliae*, *Phalaenopsis*, which are best avoided, unless you have a heated glasshouse.

Propagating: Most *Dendrobiums* (but not all) will self propagate by aerial growths or Keikes (Kay-Kees) which will send out roots. Once these are produced the aerial plant can be gently removed and re-potted into bark. If the plant does not throw aerial growths, the plant will have to be divided, so try not to break them up too often. Time to divide is when you have to re-pot. Approximately Spring.

Pests: *Dendrobiums* do not have very many pests, perhaps scale, thrip, aphids, slugs and snails which can be controlled with regular spraying and snail bait.

DO NOT collect pieces of our Native *Dendrobiums* from the bush. This is a serious offence in all parts of Australia where natives grow. Try not to buy unestablished plants, unless you are an experienced grower, they will often die.

Our *Dendrobium* flowers have a lovely perfume and are very easy to grow. They require little effort to flower. Every garden should have one or two.

Try *Dendrobium falcorostrum*, *kingianum* and *speciosum* (Rock Orchid).