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Zygopetalum

Introduction

Zygopetalum are a relatively easy species to grow and can be treated rather similarly to *Cymbidiums* although damper conditions can be tolerated. They are naturally epiphytic or terrestrial with relatively sombre coloured blooms – greens and purples. Their main attractive feature is their startlingly beautiful scent which means they are sought after when in flower. Most types have pseudobulb storage organs which allow them to be divided.



Pot type:

Pot types can vary from plastic to ceramic. *Zygopetalums* do not like to be root bound so larger pots are better. These orchids prefer a medium open mixture such as Orchiata. Repotting can occur after blooms have died off and divisions of 2 – 3 pseudobulbs can be made. These plants will grow vigorously in the correct conditions.

Grades to use:

Smaller plants, younger plants or new divisions should be planted into Classic Orchiata. Re-potted plants or larger plants may do better planted into Power Orchiata standalone alone or a mixture of Classic and Power/Power+ Orchiata. Good moisture must be maintained but still provide enough air for the roots. For larger pots a layer of straight Power+ Orchiata in the base before potting may be beneficial.

Humidity and Air:

Plants like humidity especially when light levels are high and temperatures get up. Around 50% humidity is best for these plants; levels need to be reduced if fungal spot is becoming a problem on the leaves. Air movement should be maintained at all times with these plants to help prevent disease and especially since the media is kept moist.

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Temperature:

These orchids can tolerate a wide range of temperatures (10-30°C). Much cooler temperatures can be tolerated by these plants allowing them to grow in many areas similar to *Cymbidiums*. Typical temperatures are 20-26°C during the day and 10-15°C at night during the summers. Summer highs and winter lows can be tolerated for short periods of time without plant damage. If too higher temperatures are maintained for too long it may induce bud drop where as too low temperatures for long periods may cause leaf drop. On hot days, mist to increase humidity. Some *Zygopetalum* have been observed blooming in tropical lowland gardens, so they can be resistant to hot temperatures. However the most intense colours are obtained in the intermediate range.

Light:

These plants prefer partial shade or partial sun. 3000-4000 foot candles are adequate enough for these plants. This equates to around 50 – 60% shade in summer. Direct sunlight may cause leaves to burn. Increase shade for newly potted plants coupled with cooler temperatures. Allow more light during winter.

Fertiliser:

Zygopetalum are moderate feeders especially during summer. Apply at least once a week during spring and summer with a high nitrogen (30-10-10) fertiliser at ½ strength. During flowering a 10-30-20 can be substituted Salt burn may lead to premature leaf tip burn and drop. Slow release fertiliser granules can also be used; use a 100 day release to reduce salt build up.

Irrigation:

Zygopetalum require lots of water as they prefer constantly moist conditions but not wet. Plants should be watered at least once a week in the summer with 2-3 times a week in dryer areas or for plants growing in straight Orchiata. During the winter months irrigate every 2 -3 weeks allowing a good drain period in-between; do not fully dry out however.

General/ Troubleshooting

These plants are generally easy care and are resistant to many fungal diseases common to other orchid types. However *Zygopetalum* can acquire black fungal spots on leaves which may look unsightly. Scale, slugs and snails also will devour these plants therefore relevant baits should be used. Flowering usually occurs in the winter months from autumn through to spring much like that of *Cymbidiums*.

A lot of the more modern hybrids, such as *Zygonisia* etc can be much cooler or warmer growing than standard *Zygopetalum*, however they can be maintained in average conditions together with the pure *Zygopetalum*. A wide range of hybrids have been developed in Australia, some being very dwarf which could gain favour as a pot-plant again.

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