

Bulbophyllums with Bill Williams

About 24 years ago, on a Saturday morning, I remember my brother Les coming around and giving me my first orchid. It was an unnamed *C. bowringiana* crossing. My collection at first consisted mainly of Cymbidiums that I bought locally but they eventually proved to be infected with virus so they all ended up in the incinerator. From there my other brother Frank and I turned our attention to Cattleyas and while I have again changed direction Frank has continued on with cattleyas as the basis of his orchid collection.

When Margaret brought home a small *Bulb. rothschildianum*, at the cost of \$24, with 3 pseudobulbs and one flower I was converted to a *Bulbophyllum* enthusiast because they are different and represented a challenge. Some time before I had attended a lecture at an orchid meeting and saw slides of a number of the small to tiny *Bulbophyllum* species, such as *Bulb. macphersonii*. To be quite honest, I was unimpressed by their insignificant size. It led me to believe that all members of the genus *Bulbophyllum*, with well over 1000 named species, were equally small. Thankfully I was later proved wrong! I now grow over one hundred different *Bulbophyllum* species, plus a number of hybrids, including a few I bred myself.

Following my new found interest in "bulbos", I purchased a small three pseudobulb piece of *Bulb. rothschildianum* (also from Section Cirrhopetalum). I grew this plant onto specimen size and later received a Certificate of Cultural Commendation from the Queensland Orchid Society. From that day on I was hooked. What you might say,



I had "Orchid Fever". In my opinion, to get the best result from your orchid, is to grow it to specimen size.

Mounts were recommended as the best way to grow the plants but I did not find it very successful and still don't so I changed over to pots and a bark and charcoal mix and away they went. I think that here they dry out too quickly and need that little bit of moisture around to maintain the humidity. Charcoal is getting harder to find now so I am using perlite instead. Some people use shallow trays and saucers but I find that standard pots suit my culture. I have tried the peat and perlite mix (I used 10:1) but have found that while they seem to grow

well I am not getting as good flower size that I do using bark. I believe the peat tends to make the mix acidic.

My main growing area is approximately 30ft by 20ft and covered with 70% black shade where the plants receive good air circulation. Living close to the sea we get a good breeze through the growing area most of the time. The shade houses are clear of large trees and the sun reaches the plants by 9am in winter, it was earlier until my neighbour built sheds along my fence line. No extra protection is provided on the south side, my shed provides some protection from the westerly winds. When I built the shade house I put in scoop drains lined with plastic to increase the humidity. The floor was then covered with gravel.

I water two or three times a week in summer and usually once a week in winter but with this dry spell I am watering more than that. It all depends on the weather you can't say precisely how often to water. I always flush the pots out just before I fertilise. I don't have any favourite fertiliser but do rotate between high and low nitrogen through out the year. Every Saturday I fertilise I don't care if it looks like rain or not, on Saturdays I fertilise.

I have found that most of the *Bulbophyllums* grow quite well here; *rothschildianum* and *medusea* are two of the most vigorous. If you have a specimen plant it is important not to cut them up as you could loose them, I have done it so many times. It is best to cut the growths off from the extremities of the plant making sure that each piece removed has 3-4 or more pseudobulbs. They can be repotted at any time that they are making up new roots or growths.

Over the years I have done some hybridising in this genus but since leaving work I have started doing my own flasking. I am looking to increase the size of the flowers. I find some of the smaller umbral types too small for me to work with.

