

Potting Media

One of the most discussed topics in orchid culture is the potting media. In times past this was a secret held close to the chest by some of the top growers and included 'secret ingredients'. Thankfully most modern growers are much more willing to assist and guide those of us that are not as innovative or prepared to take the time to experiment.

In recent years the media used for growing the epiphytes and lithophytes has been predominately pine bark. Preparation of the bark has differed, with some growers using it as it is purchased while others wash and soak it prior to use. Those who soak the media prior to use may also add fertilizer and or lime to the water while it soaks. Other additives are also used by some to try to keep the bark open as it ages and breaks down. Typically charcoal and isolite pieces are used for this purpose.

While this has been a simple and effective potting regime the real enthusiast continues to look for a better media. Sphagnum has its devotees and they have great success once they have an understanding of the correct potting process and established a suitable watering and fertilizing program. Several stone/rock potting media are also available but have not been readily accepted by the orchid community.

There are two major reasons to keep looking and experimenting. One is cost and this has been a major driving force for the almost uniform acceptance of bark. The second is root growth.

A potting media that has been in use for some time, but is generally restricted to specific genera, is a peat and perlite mix. As the price of bark and sphagnum climb this mix looks more and more appealing and may also, with some experimentation, provide the improved root growth being sought.

One mix that may be worth trying consists of peat 1 litre , perlite 2.5 litres, granulated isolite 2.5 litres and coarse river-sand 0.5 litres. The proportions provided are for basic guidance only and growers will need to adjust it, depending upon the local environment and the growers watering habits. The more arid the conditions the more peat that is required. Growers should also have a knowledge of the typical habitat of the genus they are growing to appreciate the water requirements.

To the mix a small quantity, about 150 mils, of blood & bone is added as well as 150 mils of garden lime to correct the Ph level. The Ph level can be checked with a dry soil test kit available from garden nurseries at around \$18 - \$20.

Crock the pot with granulated isolite or some other stable material to a depth of 1/3 of the pot. Add plant and potting mix. Tap the pot as it is filled to distribute mix around the roots of the plant. When the pot is full the mix may be gently compressed. Resist the urge

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