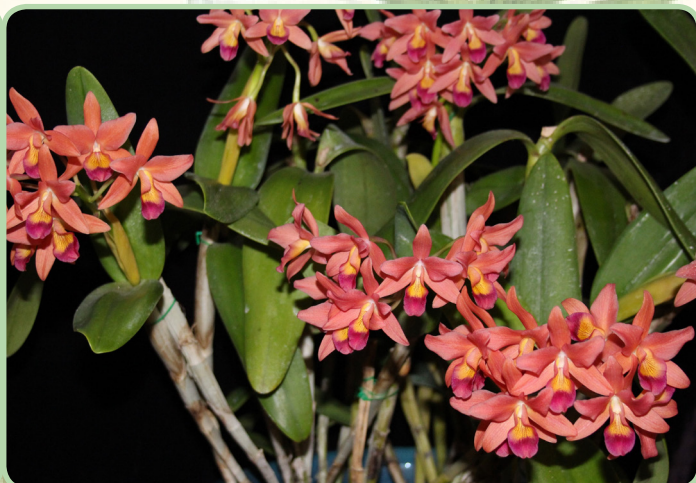


Growers guides | *Cattleya*



Cattleyas are among the most popular orchids in home culture. This genus contains 113 species, found in varied habitat throughout South and Central America. While many growers will have *cattleya* species in their collections, the most popular plants are human-made hybrids derived from combining *cattleyas* with some of their close relatives (e.g *Laelia*, *Broughtonia*) to produce a wide range of colours, shapes and sizes. Only slight variations in culture are required among most of the hybrids although some of the species may require more specific conditions.

Temperature

The ideal day temperature for growing *cattleyas* is between 22° - 30°C, while the ideal night temperature is 15° - 18°C. Occasional temperature extremes are tolerated if exposure is not prolonged.

Light

Cattleyas and their relatives require high light levels throughout the day. They enjoy full sun or bright light in the morning, but will require shading from about 11am - 3pm. They can get bright light again in the late afternoon but make sure the light is not strong enough to burn the leaves. Their leaves should be a light green colour (the colour of a lemon just before it turns yellow). If the leaves are dark green it indicates too little light.

Water

Cattleyas grow best when their potting medium becomes dry in between watering. These plants are epiphytes (live in trees) or lithophytic (grows on rocks) in nature, and are used to drying out between the rain and mist in their natural habitats. Plants in active growth (between spring and summer) need more water than plants that are resting (late autumn and throughout winter).

Feeding

Cattleyas enjoy regularly feeding. Feed at least once a month with nitrogen-rich fertilisers during the growing season although weekly feeding can be beneficial if fertilisers are diluted heavily. During the cooler seasons, feed once a month with foods rich in potassium and phosphorus. Give your *cattleyas* magnesium (epsom salts) once a month to give them an extra boost. Calcium is also highly beneficial and can be given to your plants weekly.

Humidity

Cattleyas are mainly found in the tropics and enjoy humidity levels of between 50 to 80 percent. This can be provided in the home by placing the plants on trays of gravel, which are partially filled with water so that the plants sit on the gravel and not in the water. Air should always be moving around the plants to prevent fungal or bacterial disease, especially if high humidity or cool temperatures exist.

Cutting Dead Flower Spike

Once flowering has ended and the spike has turned brown, cut the spike where it emerges from the pseudobulb. *Cattleyas* produce a single flower spike from a pseudobulb and will not reflower on an old pseudobulb.

Repotting

Cattleyas should not be repotted unnecessarily and should be repotted once the plants have outgrown the pot or when the potting medium begins to deteriorate (every two to four years). *Cattleyas* grow well in a medium that drains effectively but are also happy with being mounted. When you repot, make sure to select a pot that is only one or two sizes up from the existing pot. This will give you a few years before you need to repot again.

Did you know?

Cattleya labiata is said to be the plant that started orchid mania in Europe in the early 19th century when it was reportedly used as packing material for other plants sent from Brazil and bloomed on arrival in London.