

Growers guides | *Oncidium*



This large (over 330 species) and diverse genus from South, Central and North America, is found in an equally diverse number of habitats. *Oncidiums* may originate anywhere from sea level in the tropics to the high elevations of the Andes. This obviously makes cultural generalisations difficult although many of the species and hybrids in cultivation will thrive under the conditions presented here.

Temperature

The ideal day temperature for growing *oncidiums* 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

Oncidiums and their hybrids prefer intermediate to bright light. The leaves should be bright green as opposed to dark green or reddish green. Reddish green indicates too much light; dark green indicates not enough light. Some *oncidiums* can tolerate full sun but rather provide bright light to avoid burning the leaves.

Water

Oncidiums should become moderately dry 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. Some require a short or medium dry-rest period where water is withheld completely for a few weeks. Generally, they require more water while the new shoots are growing and less once the bulbs have formed.

Feeding

High-nitrogen fertilisers should be used during spring and summer, while low nitrogen fertilisers should be used during autumn. A general all-purpose fertiliser can be given throughout the year, although less food is required during the winter months.

Humidity

Oncidiums require minimum humidity levels of between 40 to 50%, with ideal humidity between 55 and 75%. To increase humidity in the house place the plants on trays of gravel, only partially filled with water so that the plants do not sit 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. *Oncidiums* can produce two flower spikes from a pseudobulb which can be multi-branched resulting in hundreds (sometimes thousands) of flowers. This genus will not reflower on an old pseudobulb. Some related genera such as *Psychopsis* flower repeatedly from the same flower spike and can flower for many years. Do not cut these spikes!

Repotting

Repot every two to three years during spring with a well-draining medium. As a general rule, repot them when the new shoot is two to three inches tall or when new roots appear. All the old mix should be removed from the roots and any dead roots should be removed. *Oncidiums* often do best mounted as they are epiphytic in nature. Mount your *oncidiums* on cork oak or other porous wood by placing the roots directly on to the wooden mount, covering in moss and tying with fishing line, old stockings or thin twine. These ties can be removed once the roots have fastened to the mount.

Did you know?

The first *oncidium* reported to arrive in Europe was *Oncidium flexuosum*. Plants arrived by ship in 1818 after being transported for many months from their habitats in some Brazilian mountain ranges.