

Orchids for Central Coast Gardens

The Central Coast has a rich variety of native orchids. Many of these orchids are not difficult to grow and will make a very beautiful addition to any garden. Good local nurseries sell many improved hybrids as well as our local orchid species. Look out for these local orchids when you are out walking in the bush. Observe how they grow and try to copy these natural growing conditions for your plant. **However, do remember that it is illegal to remove orchids or any other material from the bush.** Reading and talking to other growers will also help you understand the natural habitat of your orchid.

Types of orchids

There are two main groups -

- orchids that grow in the soil or leaf litter are called terrestrials,
- orchids found growing on trees and rocks are called epiphytes.

Most of the terrestrial orchids die down in winter and many of them need special cultivation, so it is more common to find epiphytic orchids available and growing in home gardens.

Epiphytes

Attach themselves to their host by-

- growing on the outer bark of a tree,
- clinging to rocks,
- sending their roots deep inside cracks and crevices of trees and stumps. The grassy clumps of ***Cymbidium suave*** are an example of this type of epiphyte in our local bushland area.

Growing epiphytic orchids on hosts

Orchids that grow naturally on the outer part of a tree or on rocks can be grown in the garden attached to tree trunks that do not lose their bark. Place a small wad of sphagnum moss on the bark, add the plant and then use a piece of old stocking to hold the plant firmly in place allowing the orchid to

establish itself on the host. Using wire or rope around a tree's circumference will kill the tree. Using only the outer bark to fasten their roots, these orchids are not parasitic to the host.

Other hosts that can be used to grow epiphytic orchids on are: a block of tree fern fibre, a piece of hardwood such as an old fence paling, dead tree branches or a cork slab. These orchids can also be grown in pots.

Growing orchids in pots

Good drainage is essential. Make sure the pot you use allows ample drainage holes and is only slightly larger than the plant you are potting. Use an open potting mix. A good quality commercial orchid potting mix specially formulated for epiphytes can be used or you can mix your own. Use 70% pine bark and 30% coarse river gravel.

Terrestrials require a potting mix of a good free draining mix such as coarse river sand mixed in equal parts with a sandy loam soil.

Water

Water passes quickly through the root system of orchids growing on trees and rocks in the wild. Water orchids regularly during the warmer months; watering once a week in the winter should be sufficient.

Air movement

Orchids like good air movement around them. They do not like stuffy conditions which can create fungal problems.

Light

The amount of light needed will depend on the type of orchid you are growing. Many orchid species need filtered light for growing and strong light or early morning sun to initiate flowering. Lack of sufficient light during summer and autumn can often be the cause of an orchid not flowering. Other orchids such as the local Christmas orchid ***Calanthe triplicata*** will grow quite happily in heavy shade.