

Oncidiinae

On-SID-in-eye

Oncidium-type orchids (Oncidiinae), also known as the “Dancing Lady” orchids, is an extraordinarily large and diverse New World group with an equally diverse number of habitats. Oncidium species may originate anywhere from sea level environments

in the tropics to the high elevation environments of the Andes. This obviously makes cultural generalizations difficult. Because of the wide range of habitats in which they are found, we recommend that you ask the grower/seller about the origin of the species that you buy, so that you get the right cultural information. -Some genera included are *Oncidium* (The type-genus), *Aspasia*, *Brassia*, *Miltonia*, *Miltoniopsis*, *Tolumnea*, *Odontoglossum*, *Psychopsis*, and many of their hybrids.

LIGHT needs can vary from an hour of direct sun to nearly a full day’s worth of direct sun, depending on the species. Most will thrive with 1-5 hours of direct sun a day. Generally, thicker-leaved plants, such as mule-ear and equitant types can stand more light. Oncidiinae are “get what you give” plants – the more light you give them, the more blooms you will get!

- In a greenhouse, shade to part-sun, or about 21,500-65,000 lumens /2,000-6,000 foot-candles, depending on the plants.
- In the home, east, south or west windows where they will get about 1-5 hours of direct sun are ideal.
- Many types of *Oncidium* will grow well under artificial light. Use lightbulbs/LEDs of your choice that are about 1-2 feet above the plant and emit >10,000 lumens. The lowest amount of lumens for growth is about 2000 lumens, though flowering may be poor.

TEMPERATURE tolerance for this group is generally considered intermediate to warm: 55 to 60 F at night, and 80 to 85 F during the day. They are happy indoors at room temperature, and you can be successful with Oncidiinae even if the temperature doesn’t swing that much from day to night. A good general rule: Temperatures up to 95 to 100 F are tolerated, but only if the plant cools down into the 70s or 80s at night and water is increased.

WATER When thinking about Oncidiinae, you must keep in mind that they like have quick wet/dry cycles. Oncidiinae like to go dry in between waterings, but like to be

immediately watered when their media hits dryness. If growing in a greenhouse, you can/should water daily regardless of whether or not it’s potted or mounted. Indoors, these plants should be grown potted, and after watering from the top, be allowed to sit in about ½” of their own flow-through for a day or two. Otherwise, indoor *Cattleya* can be taken to the shower or sink and be watered, drip dry, then be placed back. The frequency will depend on how fast it takes for the media to dry in your conditions. Use lukewarm water! Water temperature below 50 F may injure plants, as will hard water or water softened by the addition of salts. If not enough water is given, or there’s too much time between waterings, the plants will exhibit “accordion” growth. Avoid wetting foliage, as they are rather susceptible to various infections.

- In a greenhouse – water daily; twice a day if the temperatures are above 85F regardless of whether or not it’s potted or mounted.
- Indoors – These should only be grown potted, and you should keep the media perpetually lightly moist like a wrung-out sponge. This can be done by an occasional light watering. Or, you can douse the plant and wait for the media to dry before next watering.

The frequency of watering will depend on how fast it takes for the media to dry in your conditions. Generally, plants with large fleshy roots or leaves need less-frequent watering than thin-leaved or thin-rooted plants.

HUMIDITY is not necessary if you have mastered how to water these plants, as they have water at the roots to draw from, and will not need air humidity. However, if

you are a forgetful waterer, or your greenhouse gets hot, then humidity will be essential to ensuring that the media does not dry out too fast. If you do need to worry about humidity, anything >50% should be alright. Be sure to incorporate airflow if conditions are soggy, or the humidity is >75%.

FERTILIZE and water regularly to produce strong pseudobulbs. Use regular strength to ½ strength of a high nitrogen formulation (such as 30-10-10) while plants are in active growth, slowly tapering off as pseudobulbs forms. A blossom-booster formulation (such as 10-30-20) should be used as flower spikes are forming. Do not fertilize during the winter.

POTTING should be timed to coincide with the initiation of new growth, usually in the spring, but these plants tend to grow year-round, so anytime is the right time, so long as they are not in spike. New roots will be produced quickly at the time of new growth, and plants will experience minimal setback. These plants have vigorous root systems and require an evenly moist, but breathable potting medium during the growing season. Even though they can be mounted, many greenhouse growers pot their Oncidiinae to ensure that they don’t dry out.

In greenhouses, plant in anything from 100% sphagnum to 50% sphagnum and 50% fine-grade orchid bark mix. Planting in 100% tree fern fiber (or mixed with some sphagnum) also works.

Indoors, plant in either 100% tree fern fiber or 1/3 sphagnum and 2/3 fine orchid bark mix or tree fern fiber (or both).

Planting in 100% sphagnum also works, as long as it's not sitting in water with the 100% sphagnum.

The plant's back pseudobulbs should be positioned in the pot from the edge of the pot, allowing the maximum number of new growths to form in the center as the plant expands. Spread the roots over a cone of potting medium and fill in around the roots. Firm the medium around the roots.

OTHER

Equitant (A.K.A. twig epiphyte) and mule-ear (more succulent-y) types, as well as other fleshy-leaved or large-rooted plants can be grown on mounts of cork bark or tree fern, or in pots filled with a coarse, well-drained medium. This allows the drying between waterings that these types need. Keep in mind that Equitant types need either very quick wet/dry cycles (going from wet to dry in a few hours, then wet to dry again in one day), or high humidity and normal watering cycles.

Oncidiinae are especially easy to bloom, because they have no blooming requirements! Many species and hybrids will simply bloom once a new growth matures, which can happen as often as 3x a year!

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