

# cattleya

**CATTLEYA** KAT-lee-uh

While Cattleya hybrids are synonymous with “orchid” in the minds of most people, few realize that there are 50 species that are part of the native flora of Central and South America. Most are found in the tops of trees in moist tropical forests at low to mid-elevations. A tree bearing *Cattleya mossiae* in full flower is an unforgettable sight.

The large and often showy lip serves as a landing platform for pollinators, usually a bee. The colors and patterns help to guide the bee toward the pollen masses

Cattleyas typically are divided into two groups: those with one-leaved pseudobulbs and those with two-leaved pseudobulbs. Cattleyas are closely related to Laelias and Epidendrums, with whom they readily hybridize.

**Temperature** | Most Cattleyas are found at elevations between sea level and 6000 feet, where night temperatures range from 55° to 65° and day temperatures are between 75° and 85°. In cultivation, a ten to fifteen degree difference between night and day temperatures is beneficial.

**Light** | Cattleyas flower most readily when they receive bright to strong light. In the home a west or south window is best. Inside a greenhouse 50-60% shade is suitable.

**Potting** | Cattleyas need repotting either when they have outgrown their pot or when the soil mix has decomposed and become soft. The best time to repot is when the new shoot is 1-3 inches tall. The Atlanta Botanical Garden uses a mix consisting of fir bark, charcoal and perlite. Mature plants prefer a medium grade bark. Seedlings do better in fine-grade bark. Clay or plastic pots can be used; clay pots offer the advantage of better air circulation around the roots.

**Water** | Check the color of the fir bark in the soil mix. When it becomes lighter in color it's time to water. Cattleyas will not tolerate a mix that is always moist. “Drench and dry” is the rule with them.

**Fertilizer** | Fertilize plants once every two weeks with a half-strength balanced fertilizer. Applying fertilizer to a very dry plant can cause burning. Very small amounts of fertilizer with every watering is not harmful as long as the soil is leached with clear water every third watering.



*Cattleya dowiana*

Courtney Garvin



ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN