

dendrobium

DENDROBIUM den-DROH-bee-um

Among the larger genera of orchids, *Dendrobium* includes over 1000 species and is remarkable for its astonishing diversity of form, size and color. The group is so large that most authorities divide it into several sections. Many *Dendrobium* species make a spectacular floral display in spring.

Dendrobiums have exploited an enormous range of habitats over a very large geographical area in Asia. Most are epiphytes, growing on trees, although some grow on rock outcrops. Growing conditions vary from seasonally cold and dry to continuously warm and humid; exposures range from shade to full sun. Therefore knowledge of the plant's natural habitat is important to growers. A grower in any climate can cultivate *Dendrobiums* by choosing a species with compatible requirements.

Temperature, Light and Water | Buyers should consult either a knowledgeable grower or an orchid reference book to learn specific temperature and water requirements of the plant in question. Some species become dormant in winter and require a cool dry rest in order to initiate buds. Others need plenty of warmth and water year round.

Potting | *Dendrobiums* need repotting when they have outgrown their pots or when the soil mix has decomposed and become soft, best when the new shoot is 1-3 inches tall. Use a mix of fir bark, charcoal and perlite. Mature plants prefer a medium-grade bark, while seedlings do better in fine-grade bark. Clay or plastic pots can be used, though clay pots offer the advantage of better air circulation around the roots. Remove the old flower spike, but not the leafy shoot that supports it.

Fertilizer | Fertilize every two weeks with a dilute balanced fertilizer, making sure that the plant is well-watered beforehand, as application of fertilizer to a dry plant can call 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. Growers of spring-flowering *Dendrobiums* may switch to a high-phosphorus fertilizer in the fall in order to boost bud set.



Dendrobium sulawesense

Courtney Garvin



ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN