



WHY ISN'T MY ORCHID FLOWERING?

Cymbidiums are flowering (or in spike) all over the place. What, yours aren't flowering? You want to know why? I knew it would come to this, the old eternal question. Let's see if I can help you find the answer. You see, there are many reasons why Cymbidiums might not flower, and your particular plant/s may not be flowering for any one, or a number of these reasons. Some of the reasons are as follows:-

1. The most obvious reason that comes to mind is that the plant is just not ready to flower - most Cymbidiums will not flower off a plant that has any less than three or four *good, big* green pseudobulbs.
2. Second on the list just has to be light. Cymbidiums need good light to flower, and I believe this light is needed most when the plant is thinking about initiating its flower spike, which should be sometime between the end of September and the end of December. Now I know most growers, me included, say you should add shade to your plants around Melbourne Show day, which seems to contradict what I have just said, the point is you must use 50% or less shade. This is important, any more shade than this could mean no flowers. Much less shade than this could mean burnt plants.
3. Fertilising has to be next, but be careful here, I don't believe that lack of fertilising is a major factor in the lack of flowers. In fact I believe that one of the reasons that some people have problems is they give the plants fertiliser that has too much Nitrogen in it at the wrong time. You'll get beautiful dark green leaves, but flowering will suffer. I recommend that no High Nitrogen fertiliser should be given after about the end of November, however there are as many different fertilising programmes as there are growers. A fertilising programme that is often recommended, and works, is to add one level teaspoon each of 8-9 month Osmocote, Dolomite Lime and trace elements to the top 1" of the mix to a 6" pot in September. Naturally you will have to vary this amount if your pot is larger or smaller than 6", but don't overdo it.
4. Watering has a lot to do with the general well-being of the plant - if a plant dries out too much for too long it will not be healthy, and an unhealthy plant will not flower well, unless it's a last ditched effort to propagate itself before it dies. Similarly, if the plant is constantly wet, the roots, and maybe even the bulbs, will rot and die and you have the same problem - an unhealthy plant. Moist, but not soggy at all times is the general rule.
5. Potting mix is tied in with the above two factors, fertilising and watering. The mix must be well drained so the roots don't rot, yet it must be able to retain *some* moisture in between waterings. It must be able to support the plant physically and it must be able to provide some nutrition to the plant, or trap and supply fertilisers that are added externally. It must also be non-toxic to the roots.
6. Air movement is another essential product for a Cymbidium's well being and therefore, as outlined above, the ability to flower. Cymbidiums need a constant change of air around them to remain healthy, they will not be happy inside the house for any long period of time, nor will they be happy in a closed up glasshouse or other structure which doesn't allow this air movement.
7. Pests, diseases and the elements all effect flowering. The obvious way in which they do this is by physically eating, rotting or frosting off the flower spike, or the bulb that the spike would have come from. The not quite so obvious way is by being generally detrimental to the health of the plant, and as I have said before, an unhealthy plant will not give good results.
8. The last factor that comes to mind is the effect of a flower spike being left on the plant for too long last year, or the plant being badly disturbed when repotted late in the season, or any other factor which may have set the plant back. Remember, we must aim for a nice large healthy bulb for the plant to flower off. Anything that stops the bulb getting the nourishment that it needs is detrimental, not only to flowering, but to the health and general well being of the plant.

So there you have it in a nutshell, not all, but some of the reasons for a Cymbidium not flowering. When you think about it, it's a pretty good guide for the other often-asked question, "How do you grow orchids?" If you aren't getting results, now is the time to check out your growing conditions and habits, and improve them in preparation for a good flowering next year.