

Reedstem Epidendrum Culture

Reedstem epidendrums can be grown successfully by following a few guidelines and adapting them to your particular conditions. Obviously, growing outdoors all year round is easy for those living in Southern Florida or Southern California, but not feasible for those in New York. Since the factors of good culture are interdependent, Epidendrum growers will have to experiment to some degree to succeed. The grower's ultimate goal is a fairly compact, robust plant with multiple leads of large heads of flowers.

Light: This may be the single most important factor. With too little light, the plant will become leggy and will not follow well, if at all. The level should be equal to or greater than that for growing cattleyas (2500-3500 footcandles or about 60-70% shade). If you give your epidendrum too much light, the foliage may bronze a bit from stress. At Cal-orchid, we use a large and rather high peaked greenhouse with very high light but not great heat buildup. In some parts Southern California and South Florida people have their plants growing happily outdoors to gain adequate light. If you are growing your plants indoors and are struggling to get your culture just right, then it might be better, if you live in a mild climate, to move your plants outdoors when the weather permits, wintering indoors. Others may need to supplement what natural light they have in their home setting. When growers describe their epis as rambling to three and four feet tall, the problem is always too little light.

Water: Epidendrums, like most tropical orchids, have two distinct seasons; a hot, wet growing period followed by a cooler, drier, flowering season. We generally see new growth initiating around the first of March. At this time we increase the water (depending on the weather) to every four to five days, keeping the plants constantly moist but not soggy. By the end of the growing season, which for us is September into October, we decrease the watering to seven to eight day intervals, allowing the plants to dry out somewhat between waterings. We have rarely seen plants that suffered from too little or too much water. As a rule of thumb, if you water once a week, you will likely succeed. Just remember to water well when you do water!

Potting Media: Never before have there been so many potting media options presented for successful orchid culture. Since the frequency of watering is dependent upon the potting mix you use, you must adjust your watering schedule to suit your particular needs. For epidendrums, we mix fine and medium grade fir bark in almost equal volumes and then add 15 to 20 percent coarse perlite. Under our conditions and with our watering practices, epis enjoy an open mix. We are sure that other media such as coconut chips, inorganics or semi-hydroponics will work just as well. Just be sure to adjust your watering and fertilizer accordingly.

Fertilizer: If you think there is an abundance of choices of media, just look at the number and brands of fertilizers currently used and marketed. For the hobby grower, we recommend any brand of commercially made fertilizer with a formula approximating 20-10-20. If you are using purified water you will have to provide additional calcium; many people use Cal-Mag fertilizer occasionally to accomplish this objective. By September or October, we greatly reduce the amount of fertilizer to the plants so as to limit cane growth in the winter. The only other thing we do for the epis is to sometimes use monopotassium phosphate (available at better nurseries and garden centers) to control the growth and strengthen the plants.

Temperature: Though most people think of epis as outdoor garden plants able to take near freezing temperatures, the newer breeding line do better with more moderate temperatures. We hold the greenhouse night temperatures to a minimum of 50F. During half of the year it hovers at approximately 60F. Maintaining higher night temperatures will result in lengthening the plant habit somewhat. Many customers in tropical climates such as South Florida and Puerto Rico now grow our plants successfully. We have test-grown some plants outdoors in Santa Barbara down to 40F, under cover, with no apparent damage. Plants that get too much of a chill will show stress by bronzing in the foliage, or even worse, the leaves will appear soft and then drop off. It is remarkable how these plants seem to rebound from this punishment if cut back by half and coddled a bit however it is best to avoid such stress. Though we try to maintain a high of no more than 80F, these plants seem to be extraordinarily durable and have proven to be able to grow well under a wide temperature range.