

Do Cymbidiums Require a Shock to Bloom?

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Years ago we felt cymbidiums must be allowed to dry at the roots in the late summer in order to shock them into producing bloom spikes. We grew out of that era learning by trial and error that these plants grew and produced much more successfully by our providing instead a constant moisture level in a well-drained potting media.

From the "drying out" method we moved along to the "change of fertilizer in the fall" era of growing. We have been in this era for the past 18-20 years with only a slight deviation from that stated practice. That deviation came about when one of the guiding technical advisors to our trade suggested that cymbidiums should receive a constant balanced fertilizer level in all stages of growth allowing that the plant would absorb what was needed to maintain a healthy balance. I have been recently told that this leading authority is finding enough evidence that the "change of diet in the fall" formulation actually produces more flowers than the steady balanced fertilizer program; that he is now returning to the "change of diet" method of fertilization.

Basically, this is how it works: We know that most cymbidiums require a 20° F. change of temperature between night and day temperatures to bloom. In areas where this does not occur naturally, it must be provided artificially. In Hawaii the physical moving of cymbidium plants to a higher elevation where a lower night temperature prevails does the trick; in Texas the artificial lowering of night temperature through the use of desert coolers at night; in Florida and other warm night areas, the watering of plants at night rather than daytime, thereby lowering root and bulb temperatures. Some even use ice cubes around the base of the bulbs in order to lower night temperatures. All this because we find this "shock" method of the minimum 20° difference between night and day temperature actually works!

In addition to this, and at approximately the same time of year, the previously referred to "change of fertilizer diet" aids in promoting more and sturdier bloom spikes.

Growth maturity on cymbidiums varies as to the individual hybrid and to the physical area of the country, but basically most growers agree upon these following points:

The standard cymbidium begins its new growth in the spring, actively grows during the summer and somewhere around mid-August to mid-September the new growth is approximately three-quarters developed. At that critical time it responds to both temperature variance and a change from a high nitrogen fertilizer (principally for growth) to a low nitrogen, high potash and phosphate formula of fertilizer, and sets its spikes for bloom production. The higher

potash and phosphate aid in the "hardening off" of the newly produced growth and aid in the production of sturdy spikes and flowers. A low nitrogen fertilizer is then maintained during the fall and winter reverting again to the higher nitrogen content fertilizer in the spring or during the month of March.

Another method that seemingly works is one of definite shock. If certain plants have been maintained under optimum conditions, have many large, full green bulbs yet still do not produce, I urge you to give the plants as much sun as possible. Frequently a "full-sun" treatment will shock the plant into bloom. You may experience sunburn on the area where the leaves bend so be careful of the tremendous heat of noon-day sun. In providing the full-sun treatment you must also be aware that the plant will require more water, hence more fertilizer as well. Good luck!

The mystery of exactly "what" makes a cymbidium decide to produce either a flower spike or leaf growth from the very same eye on the bulb has not yet been determined. The above comments serve only as a guide until we discover those mysterious facts.

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