



Bulbophyllum

Introduction:

Bulbophyllum are the largest genus in the orchid family with species deriving from the high and low altitude rain and cloud forests of most tropical and subtropical countries. They have tremendous variation in their growth habit, ranging from fully terrestrial species to giant epiphytic climbers. They can bloom directly from the rhizome or the growth, depending on the species. Whilst it seems they are a diverse group of plants, they can mostly be grown together. They are a good genus to cultivate and relatively forgiving.



Pot type:

These orchids can be grown mounted on slabs of cork or tree fern. However, all the species can be grown in shallow pots, or even baskets. One requirement is to retain enough moisture at the root, as most species don't like to dry out. The rhizome can be trained to stay in the pot by bending them, eventually cutting the old bulbs and leaving them in place, so they will provide additional growth in the pot. Sphagnum has been popular because it retains a lot of moisture, which is what these plants prefer when in active growth; however when it decays or starts to retain too many salts, the plants will have problems. One common problem being rot, for some more sensitive species, sphagnum will have a too low pH, resulting in either rhizome or emerging growth rot. Growers then start to keep the sphagnum dryer to prevent the rot, but it precludes a strong, fast growth. Orchiata has a higher pH, retains enough moisture and due to Orchiata's longevity there is no need to disturb the plant for some years. Using a tube made of a fine plastic mesh is an option to use Orchiata for climbing or mounted *Bulbophyllum*. Coir tends to have a high pH after some months for many species, resulting in chlorotic growth, and eventually new leaf rot due to deficiencies.

Grades to use:

Seedlings should be deflasked in Precision Orchiata and nearly all mature plants can be grown in Classic Orchiata. *Bulbophyllum* need to have ample water supply when the plants are in active growth, and a drought of even a couple of days is enough to kill the new growths and set back the plant. Many species have specific times for rooting, either as the growth emerges or when it matures, depending on the variety, and won't root easily on old roots. Roots emerging on old roots will allow the plant to survive, but not grow properly; these are intended by the plant to just prevent death.



Humidity and Air:

Humidity should be quite high for most species. With the exception of some xerophyte species, the plants need a high humidity when they are growing. Attention must be paid however to the rest period. Many species from cool or cold growing area, as well as from distinct wet/dry seasons climate may experience a rest. At that time, they can be sensitive to high humidity, which can lead to foliar spots.

Temperature:

Bulbophyllum will tolerate temperatures ranging from 7°C to 35°C but prefer temperatures between 12°C – 25°C; night temperatures generally are 12°-15°C for higher altitude species and 15-18C for lower altitude (warmer) plants. Tropical lowland species can be slightly cold sensitive but higher altitude species can tolerate the cold as a general guideline. However, when they start to grow, it is possible to keep the plant in perpetual growth without any rest. *Bulbophyllum* are very easy when it comes to temperature, as they can be adapted through the feeding schedule.

Light:

Many species prefer good light, however, some will have requirements for very bright light, where some will need deep shade. Ensure you check carefully the requirements of all the species. *Bulbophyllum lobbii*, *medusae* or *phalaenopsis* are very easy to adapt, species such as *B.reticulatum* requires deep shade. They can always be grown in a range of 8-10.000 lux however, with higher light levels, the feeding needs to be adapted.

Fertiliser:

Bulbophyllum need to be amply fed when the new growth emerges and have starting roots. They are especially intolerant of nitrogen deficiency which will kill the growth right away. In bright light conditions, 0.5g/L of fertilizer must be used as a standard, like a 20-20-20. For the huge or strong growing species such as *Bulbophyllum phalaenopsis* or *lobbii*, the feeding can be increased in bright light up to 1g/L. It is important to flush heavily with every feeding. Additional applications of Calcium chloride at 1g/L as a heavy spray every 2 weeks will be beneficial.

Irrigation:

Bulbophyllum should for most species be kept evenly moist throughout the year. Although the plants do not like saturated conditions the media should not be allowed to dry out. Conditions can be kept slightly drier in winter especially for colder climate varieties which may stop growing. Water heavily and allow to drain well.

Bulbophyllum are very easy to grow once started. It is important with new plants to get new roots as fast as possible. A 10-52-10 or similar fertilizer can be used at 0.5g/L for the first couple of weeks. Once new growth has been started and new roots formed, they are very forgiving plants, except of extreme drought and extreme light. Most are very rewarding with flowers appearing several times per year, and can be grown successfully to specimen size.