

### **Care of your Cattleya Orchid**

Cattleyas and their hybrids (label may read C., Blc, Slc, Bc, Lc, etc) are epiphytes in the wild. This means that they grow on trees, NOT in the ground. Because they are used to their roots being bathed in rain water, they are NOT adapted to the high mineral content of soil. Therefore, you should try to use soft water (Dartmouth and Halifax town water is OK), RO (reverse osmosis water found in the grocery), rain water (you can melt snow or freeze rain water as ice cubes in bags), etc. but you should try to avoid using hard water such as most well water and much of the town water in Nova Scotia, water treated with a water softener (taboo!!!), or so called spring water sold in the grocery (has quite a bit of mineral in it). They should be kept damp but not soggy and should be fertilized 2 or 3 times a month in the summer and once or twice a month in the winter with a good orchid fertilizer or house plant (cut the amount in half for the latter) fertilizer. Hanging basket pelleted slow release fertilizer 14-14-14 is great spring to fall. Generally a higher third number and a smaller middle number will give the most flowers. So called "Blossom Booster" is the opposite and does not work well for orchids. Do not fertilize dry plants. They like a moderate amount of sun. If the leaves are hot or you are uncomfortable sitting in the same spot (too much heat from the sun), then the plants are suffering. Sometimes a small fan will help. Cattleyas can take temperatures of 12 to 30 C but are most happy at 15 to 25 C, with the temperature lower at night than during the day. Repot in a bark or bark/coco mix when the new growths start to grow out of the pot or the media is breaking down (looks black and mushy). You can add a layer of New Zealand grade sphagnum to the top to help retain moisture and encourage rooting. Repotting is best done when new roots are appearing.