

## **Orchid of the Month – *Catasetum* – AOS Culture Sheet** submitted by Susan Makar

This unusual group of orchids offers fascinating, waxy flowers that often have the peculiar habit of discharging their pollen masses (pollinia) onto pollinators. Almost always deciduous, the pseudobulbous plants have strict growing and resting periods. Most flower before entering a dormant period when they drop their leaves.



**Light** should be strong, especially near the end of the growth period. Early in the annual growth cycle, plants will tolerate less light, from 1,500 to 3,000 foot-candles. Plants grow best with light levels of 3,000 to 6,000 foot-candles, or one-half to three-fourths full sun. As pseudobulbs mature, harden them by giving slightly more light.

**Temperatures** reflect the fact these orchids are native to hot tropical areas and grow during the rainy summer months. During this growing period, day temperatures of 80° to 100° F and night temperatures of 60° to 65° F are beneficial. After growths mature, temperatures can be reduced to 55° F at night, with day temperatures of 70° to 85° F.

**Water** is a critical factor for the production of large pseudobulbs that result in best flowering. A great quantity of water must be stored by the plant in a relatively short growing season. Water heavily as new leaves are forming. As the pseudobulb matures, gradually reduce watering frequency. Leaves will yellow and drop. At this time, watering should be stopped completely until new growth begins. Water during this dormant period only if the pseudobulbs shrivel severely.

**Humidity** should be 40 to 60 percent. This can be provided in the home by placing the plants on trays of gravel, only partially filled with water so that the plants do not sit in the water. Air should always be moving around the plants to prevent fungal or bacterial disease, especially if high humidity or cool temperatures exist. In the greenhouse, the humidity is best increased by use of a humidifier. Evaporative cooling increases humidity while cooling the air.

**Fertilize** and water regularly to produce strong pseudobulbs. Use a high-nitrogen formulation (such as 30-10-10) while plants are in active growth, slowly tapering off as pseudobulbs form. A blossom-booster formulation (such as 10-30-20) should be used in the autumn, except for plants that normally bloom in the spring. Frequent applications of a dilute concentration of fertilizer are more effective than occasional applications of strong concentrations.

**Potting** should be timed to coincide with the initiation of new growth, usually in the spring. New roots will be produced quickly at that time, and plants will experience minimal setback. These plants have vigorous root systems and require a rich, moist potting medium during the growing season. Many growers bare-root their plants during the resting period to ensure dryness at that time.