

December 2020 Sunset Valley Orchids Catasetinae Growing Tips

Now that winter has really set in, your *Catasetums* and *Cycnoches* will have matured their growths and finished flowering, but there are always a few late bloomers that soon should be on their way to dormancy. *Mormodes* will be finishing up their bloom season, and now it's time for many of the *Clowesia* hybrids to flower.

The onset of dormancy is caused by several factors: the maturity of the pseudobulb, shortening day length, cooler day/night temperatures and a reduction of root zone moisture. The yellowing and dropping of leaves signal the beginning of dormancy. Now is the time to stop fertilizing and cut back on watering frequency, simulating the end of the wet season in nature. This change in culture will cause the pseudobulbs to harden off in preparation for the upcoming months of dormancy. When most leaves are yellow/brown and have fallen off, cease watering altogether. This marks the start of the dormant period.

Those of you in Florida and the southern states will have dormant plants now, and it's possible that some of you may start to see the first beginnings of new growth.



These six plants illustrate the progression of Catasetinae into dormancy, from left to right: 1) leaf tip yellowing, 2) leaf yellowing, browning and abscission, 3) more yellow leaves, tip die back and leaf drop, 4) obvious missing leaves at base, 5) two leaves remaining, 6) leafless plant.

Not all plants lose all of their green leaves when dormant, and it's not uncommon for some to hold a few leaves well past the point when irrigation has stopped.

The onset of dormancy generally occurs naturally; however, when plants are cultivated in consistently warm growing areas, such as in the home or under lights, dormancy sometimes needs to be encouraged. I have found that managing

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irrigation is one of the best tools to trigger dormancy. If you still have plants in December with a full complement of green leaves, it's time take a more aggressive approach. Allow the media to become dry, regardless of the number of green leaves. Let the media stay dry for 3-4 days then water sparingly, about one or two ounces of water. The water may flow right through the media, and that's okay. Allow the media to dry and wait 4-5 day before following the same stingy irrigation procedure. Repeat this process, increasing the dry interval between waterings. This will trigger dormancy in plants that are resisting the transition.

By late December, it's important to get your Catasetinae into the dormant stage and provide them with an adequate rest period so that they will "wake up" early in the spring to a long growing season that will help them to develop big bulbs and lots of flowers!

I've been getting questions about indoor light levels during dormancy. It is best to keep the plants in nearly the same light levels as in the growing season: target 2000-2500 foot candles. It is easy to download a Foot Candle Reader app for your phone. If you're growing under lights, you do need to adjust the day length throughout the year, as all Catasetinae experience changes in the number of daylight hours per day. This adjustment is important for all your orchids that come from areas where day length changes during the year.

Light level management Indoors

Growing under lights for optimal results:

April – October: day length should be set at 15 hrs.

November: reduce light schedule hour to = 14 hrs.

December: reduce one more hour = 13 hrs.

January: and reduce one more hour = 12 hrs.

February: add one hour = 13 hrs.

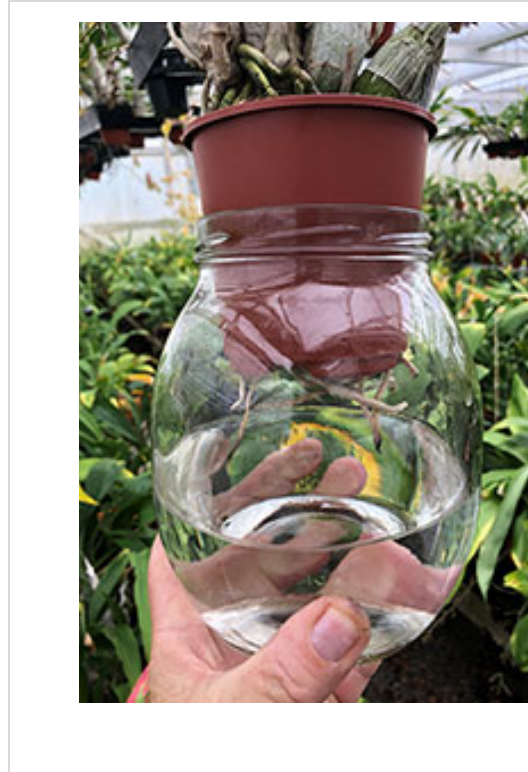
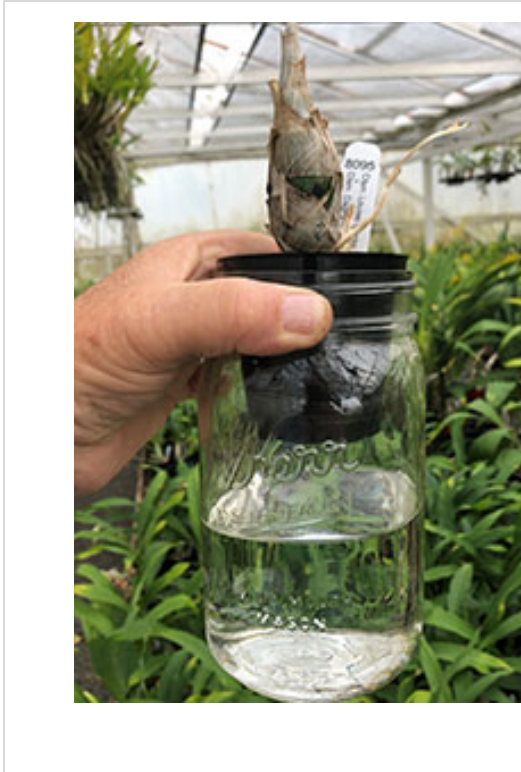
March: add one more hour = 14 hrs.

April – October: back to a day length schedule of 15 hrs.

I shared this idea with the last newsletter, and it's worth sharing again.

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If you've had challenges overwintering your Catasetinae plants, it is most likely due to excessive dehydration, perhaps caused by long periods of low humidity. Here is a solution being used successfully by some ingenious growers in locations with low winter humidity.



Set the pot in a jar with water, making a loose-fitting seal with the rim of the jar. The water should not touch the bottom of the pot. The reservoir will maintain high humidity around the roots, even while the plant remains dry during dormancy. This innovative technique produces great results! We have had lots of positive feedback from growers who are using this method.

As my Catasetinae go to "sleep" for the winter I am reminded of the words of Shelley: *"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"*