



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Miltoniopsis- You Can't Grow Them Here!

by Suzanne Susko, suzsusko@bellsouth.net



*Mps. Lennart Karl Gottling 'Red Rim'
Love the waterfall pattern on the lip*

Let me tell you how the story begins. One sunny spring afternoon as I was walking slowly through a large indoor orchid show, I spotted a flower and plant I had never seen before at local shows. It looked like a huge pansy and the fragrance was absolutely amazing. As I approached the vendor to inquire how much they were selling the plants for, I heard a loud voice shout 'you can't grow those here in Florida'. The vendor continued by explaining that the orchids are cool growing and 'you can't grow them in Florida'. Undaunted by the vendor's advice I purchased several and proceeded toward my first attempt at the infamous Miltoniopsis. I didn't know anything about growing

Milts. What have I done?

On the way home my car filled with a sweet lemon fragrance, I needed to quickly learn Miltoniopsis culture requirements. Miltoniopsis grow at highland rainforests in South America. Check. I live barely above sea level. Strike one. They grow well at cool to intermediate temperatures. Check. The thermometer that displays my outside temperature is showing 90 degrees. Strike two. They love high humidity. Check. I've got that! Florida has high humidity, but all of my other orchids are growing outside in a lanai in very hot humid conditions, I really needed to figure out a plan for cool growing. The conditions had to be a total reversal from how I grow my other orchids.

The Growing Setup and Light Levels. Based on Miltoniopsis culture and my outside growing conditions it was clear that I needed to have some type of indoor growing setup. An old desk with some plastic sheeting as protection was the choice. The desk was placed in an inside corner of the house with both south and west facing windows. It was quite surprising how much light Miltoniopsis require. They needed to grow in almost cattleya light levels or about 2000 foot-candles. The leaf color is the best indicator of correct light levels. Leaves should be close to light green. Even with both a south and west facing window, our afternoon storms in the summer reduced the light levels. The plants were not getting enough light. A T5 LED Grow light was added as a supplement for those cloudy afternoons. The leaf color improved and the growth was much better.



Growing tent for humidity next to a window. A T5 LED light was added to compensate for gray summer days.



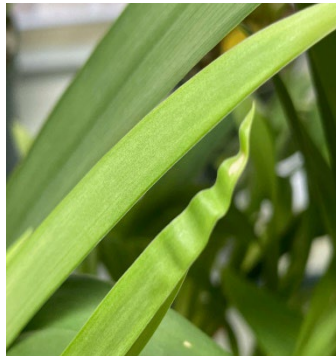
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Learning to Play the Accordion. During my first attempts to grow Milts, I learned about accordions. Not the musical instrument, but funny leaf shapes. New growths would get stuck inside the old growths and end up looking like accordions. I don't play the accordion. At first, I thought I wasn't watering enough, but it was because of low humidity. Although they seem to do okay with normal house humidity of



Accordion pleating suggested not enough humidity



A small personal humidifier was added inside the tent

around 50%, Miltoniopsis prefer lots of humidity – somewhere around 60-70%. In order to increase the humidity, a small personal humidifier and plastic cover was added to the mini-greenhouse. This helped to maintain the humidity level close to 70%, which solved the accordion problem. As an added bonus I didn't have to water as much.



Winter pop up greenhouse

Summer to Winter Shuffle. When the temperature outside begins to cool, the summer to winter shuffle begins. While orchid growers in Florida are moving their outside summered orchids inside, the Miltoniopsis are moved outside to enjoy cooler temperatures. Miltoniopsis prefer 75-80 degree temperatures. Everybody gets moved to a small greenhouse with a heater for use on very cold days. In the late Spring the reverse happens and everybody gets moved back inside, but not before getting a thorough de-bugging. The first season I failed to do this step and spent several days chasing a variety of critters around the spare room. At least two weeks before they are moved inside pest control

begins. Orthene is inexpensive and effective against any critters that may have moved in during the winter. Miltoniopsis seem to have very few pests, so the Orthene works well. Spray all of the foliage and thoroughly soak the media for those critters hiding below the pot's rim. Orthene stinks so begin your de-bugging outside about two weeks before any plants are moved inside.

Potting Media. Miltoniopsis have very thin roots but lots of them. Most of the first Miltoniopsis I purchased were planted by vendors in sphagnum moss which stayed too wet and degraded too quickly. Miltoniopsis do not like to be repotted. Removing old sphagnum severely damaged the roots. I have found that potting in a fine bark mix (fir, perlite, charcoal) works well.

Spring Fling. Miltoniopsis bloom in the spring/summer with the spike emerging from last year's growth. Beware of stuck spikes. The leaves can be so tightly packed against the plant's bulb that the bloom spikes can sometimes get stuck. Watch out for anything stuck



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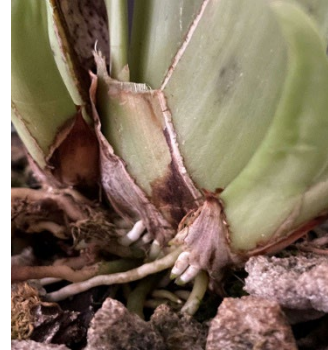
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between the leaves in early spring. Once blooming has started get ready for long lasting flowers with light to very heavy lemon fragrance. Flowers can last up to 6 months.

Summer Growth. New growth begins shortly after flowering usually in late Spring or early Summer. The growth will emerge from the bulb that flowered. Milts have a growth habit similar to Catasetums. The growth will sprout from the side of a previous growth and grow quite large before producing any roots. Once you see the new roots, you can repot if it needs it.



New growths emerge at the base of last year's growth.



New roots don't appear until the new growth is almost mature.

During summer growth, Milts are water hogs. Plants are watered every 4 days. The new roots are misted lightly every day until they find their way into the media. Clear plastic pots help to monitor the moisture level. Plants need to be constantly moist, but not soggy. The leaf tips will be the indicator if the plant is getting enough moisture. Brown leaf tips indicate the media is too dry.

Rewards are Worth the Trouble. It is definitely worth all the trouble for the enjoyment of these beautiful plants. With a little planning and an understanding of Miltoniopsis culture, you too can enjoy these extremely long lasting fragrant flowers. Give it a try.



*Miltoniopsis Andrea West
Miltoniopsis blooms make it all worthwhile*

Suzanne started growing orchids in 1974 after picking up a little bag baby from a Florida K-Mart while on vacation. She grew everything in her Virginia basement under lights until moving to Florida in 1998. She can be reached at email suzsusko@bellsouth.net.