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4.4 The Secret to Propagating *Cattleya Bowringiana*



C. Bowringiana is one of the easiest orchids to grow and flower, if you can successfully propagate them from the initial divisions. It grows rapidly and within a few years, it can grow into a specimen with over 20 flowers per spike. Even with minimal care, they can produce 8-16 flowers per spike. Of course, it is best to start with a healthy, potted plant. However, if you are starting with a small division (usually rootless), getting it to root successfully is the only difficult part of growing this orchid.

The above is a propagation from a wild plant collected in Belize. Note the healthy new

growths, the shorter growths grown under poor conditions and the full sized growths that are flowering. This plant was propagated from a large plant grown in potting soil, outdoors in Tampa, Florida, and is flowering nicely. The division was initially potted in cattleya mixture (bark, charcoal, etc.) and produced the smaller growths, most of which did not flower. It was then re-potted in potting soil as you can see and is flowering and growing happily. Since many growers successfully grow them in cattleya mixtures, they can be repotted into such mixtures after they have produced enough roots in a controlled cattleya (greenhouse) environment.

So the difficulty in propagation is what to do initially, for example, if you get a single plant with no roots. Such a plant potted into a cattleya mix will require constant expert attention to survive. The success rate will be low unless you are an experienced orchid grower, and most amateurs will fail and wonder what went wrong. The secret to making this process very easy is to PLANT IT INTO POTTING SOIL (and stake it so it does not move). Let the soil cover most of the bulb at the bottom but do not cover the entire bulb. The rooting process responds very well to potting soil and moisture control becomes much easier. Especially in areas where they can be grown outdoors most of the year, planting in potting soil works better than in cattleya mixes (bark, osmunda, etc.). They can be grown permanently in potting soil, but in an orchid environment created in a controlled greenhouse, they might do better in cattleya mixes. Even in a greenhouse, they will probably root more quickly in potting soil, especially if the initial division does not have any roots. Also, they seem to prefer potting soil when grown outdoors. When repotting a plant that is successfully growing, do not cover the bulbs at the bottom with soil.

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