



Cultural Requirements of Brunette Dendrobiums

Most species are suitable for beginning orchidists, even those who claim to be able to wilt a leaf if they so much as look at it the wrong way. If you fall into this category, then try some nigrohirsute dendrobiums. Nigro-what? The former sectional name, meaning dark-haired, is derived from the conspicuous, distinctive black or brown hairs on the leaf-sheaths. Think of them as the "brunettes" of the dendrobiums. Most of the more than 35-40 species in this group have inflorescences of few, mostly white flowers (some green or yellow) marked or flushed with yellow, orange, or red and often appearing more than once from the same stem. The species as a group are distributed from the Himalayas and southern China to Malaysia and the Philippines. Prominent in the group are *Den. Bellatulum*, *cruentum*, *dearei*, *draconis*, *formosum*, *infundibulum*, *lowii*, *margaritaceum*, *sanderae*, *schuetzei*, *trigonopus*, and *williamsosnii*. With ease of care, beautiful, long-lasting flowers, and widespread availability, no one should refuse any of these delightful orchids.



Light-Supply approximately 2,000-3,000 foot-candles of light for best results. *Dendrobium formosum* requires more light than most and will even tolerate full sun if hardened off gradually. In general, species of this group will grow satisfactorily under light conditions at the same level or above that for cattleyas.

Temperature-*Dendrobium formosum* occurs at relatively low elevations (such as in coastal mangrove swamps), and so may be grown under intermediate to warm conditions (55-70°F at night). *Dendrobium infundibulum*, on the other hand, chiefly occurs from 4,000-5,000 feet above sea level, dictating a cool to intermediate night-time temperature (45-65°F)

Watering & Fertilizing-Unlike the *nobile*-type dendrobiums, these are ever-green species that do not require long, severe rest period essential to flower initiation. Water and fertilizer are withheld only very slightly upon the completion of new growth. Some growers give them no rest at all. Analysis of the fertilizer to use depends on the potting medium—30-10-10 for plants potting in fir bark or tree fern and 20-20-20 (or 18-18-18) for all inert media such a cork nuggets or slabs. As for most other orchids, it is best to make up fertilizer solutions at strength of only half or what is recommended and fertilize weekly or biweekly during active growth.

Humidity & Air Movement-Try to maintain at least 50% humidity and adequate air flow throughout the growing area. A gentle, moist, buoyant breeze is preferable to a hurricane.

Potting-Perfect drainage is essential. To accomplish this, the use of fir bark or tree fern in clay pots is recommended. Be sure to place pieces of rock or gravel in the bottom of the pot. Avoid oversized pots. These species, as many other dendrobiums, prefer to be slightly underpotted. The plants also may be affixed to tree fern plaques or cork slabs.

Remember: Given sufficient light, the brunette dendrobiums will reward you many times over.

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