

## Miltonia Culture Information

Miltonia (*mil-TOE-nee-uh*) are part of the Odontoglossum alliance and, whilst plants tend to be smaller than other Odontoglossums, their flowers are large, colourful and quite often scented.

Commonly known as the pansy orchid, they originate from Columbia but most of the plants purchased today are hybrids.

They are compact, clump-forming plants with flat, oval-shaped pseudo-bulbs from which 1 to 3 leaves form and one or more flowering spikes are produced. Flowers are large and quite often scented.



**Flowering:** The flowering season is usually during late spring to early summer although newer hybrids have extended the season and it is possible to see Miltonia flowering throughout the year. The flower spikes grow from the new bulbs. Individual flower stems may last for 4 to 6 weeks.

Successful flowering requires low temperatures and restricted watering during the winter, whilst maintaining relatively high humidity and very good ventilation.

**Temperature:** Intermediate conditions are required for most hybrids with a nighttime temperature of 16-18°C and a daytime temperature of 18-24°C. In summer, the maximum temperature should be around 24-27°C; if they are kept higher than this for any length of time they may not flower. In winter, the temperature should be kept above 14°C; if they are allowed to get colder than this extra care should be taken to water less.

**Note:** To help prevent flower and bud drop, keep plants away from drafts, radiators and other heat sources.

**Light:** Good light in winter but during the summer months they need to be shaded from direct sunlight. A north facing windowsill is ideal. If you notice a red pigmentation to the leaves this may be an indication that the plant is getting too much light and they need to be moved to a more shady position.

**Water:** Keep compost evenly moist, but not waterlogged, throughout the year. Always water from the top, avoid getting water on the foliage and allow any excess to drain away. Plants grow most actively during the summer when they should be watered once a week. The autumn is the time of year when the pseudo-bulbs are ripening and, to encourage flowering, plants can be kept slightly on the dry side until they start to flower. When in flower, water more often.

**NOTE: NEVER STAND THE PLANT IN WATER OR ALLOW THE PLANT TO BECOME WATERLOGGED. This will cause the roots to rot and kill the plant.**

Miltonia are very fussy about water and will not tolerate hard water. Clean rainwater is preferred by the plant. Do not use water softened by a chemical water softener as this contains saline salts and will kill any plant.

**Feed:** Miltonia need regular feeding with a weak solution of orchid feed, especially in the summer when it is best to feed every other watering. Use a balanced orchid fertilizer, such as Ivens Orchids' Orchid Feed. During the autumn, feeding once a month should be sufficient. They do not need to be fed in winter.

**Air Humidity:** Good humidity levels are needed, (about 50-60%,) so moist air is essential; they also require good air circulation (not drafts) to prevent botrytis or bacterial/fungal infection. The plant can be placed on a tray of moist pebbles to help with local humidity or kept in a room where humid air is present such as a bathroom, kitchen, utility room or conservatory.

**After Flowering:** Cut off old flower stems near to the base. Next seasons flowers will develop from new pseudo-bulbs.

**Repotting:** Miltonia will benefit from repotting every other spring, the best time being as the new roots and shoots are developing. It is best not to repot in the summer. It is important to use orchid compost which has a very open texture usually made from a mix of moss and bark. Special orchid compost is available from Ivens Orchids.

Do not be tempted to use too big a pot; Miltonia do better when their roots are restricted so use the smallest pot possible. At the end of the season, it is normal to lose the odd lower leaf or two and new leaves should develop from the top of the pseudo-bulbs. Repotting and dividing classes are available from Ivens Orchids.

Whilst Miltonias can be divided in a similar way to other Odontoglossums, they do not respond well to constant dividing. It is far better to pot up regularly and grow a Miltonia into a mature specimen plant.

**Basic Repotting Technique:** Tap the plant out of its old pot and inspect the condition of the root-ball. Shake off any decaying compost and remove all the dead, soft or black roots. Remove any old black or soft pseudo-bulbs with no roots but make sure to leave at least 2 older pseudo-bulbs or "back bulbs". These pseudo-bulbs help to support the plant should it become stressed after repotting. Use the smallest pot possible. Support the plant in the centre of the pot and feed fresh orchid compost around the root-ball. Do not pack the compost in too firmly, as these plants prefer a free draining pot. Always dampen down the compost before potting and only water sparingly for the first 2 weeks after repotting allowing the plant to get used to the new compost. \_

**Pests:** Prevention is always better than cure so look for good healthy plants to start with and keep them that way with a clean environment for your plants. Throw away old, weak or infested houseplants and maintain good housekeeping in the greenhouse. Most often seen pests are scale insect, aphids, thrip, bush snail and red spider mite. All of these will weaken the plant if left unchecked. The scale and aphids may be cleaned off with soapy water, (if found early enough,) otherwise treat with a specific systemic insecticide.

**Buying Tips:** Always buy good quality orchids from a reputable supplier and look for clean healthy plants. Unless you have ideal transportation and growing conditions, buying a plant with immature buds may be a mistake as some plants can be sensitive to being moved during the early stages of flower development. Look for plants whose flower buds look quite plump and ready to open.

**Special Notes:** If new leaves come through "concertinaed", this is normally due to erratic watering or the plant getting too hot or drying out and is most likely to occur during the summer. Make sure the plant is regularly watered and also try increasing humidity and cooling down the leaves by a light overhead misting of the foliage.

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