

Cymbidium Potting Mixes

Text and Photos by LOREN BATCHMAN

Cymbidiums like a slightly acid potting mix that provides good drainage. Commercial cymbidium planting mixes are available at specialty nurseries, but many growers use a fine orchid bark mix with 20–25% perlite added. Sand, coarse peat and redwood bark or shavings are often added to improve the water retention in inland locations.

Straight seedling orchid bark ($\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch) or medium orchid bark can also be used. Larger grades of bark will require more frequent watering, but there is less risk of overwatering. Some add coir, coconut husk chips, coarse peat or leaf mold and sand to the mix also. Cymbidiums can also be grown in mixes containing pumice or lava rock.

For mature plants or seedlings in six inch pots, we have used a mix of 80% seedling grade ($\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch size) orchid

bark mixed with 20% #3 perlite, plus $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of finely ground dolomite lime added for each cubic foot of mix. For larger plants, 40% seedling grade and 40% larger grade of bark ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch) with 20%



Potting mixes should retain moisture but also allow air at the roots. This example combines coconut husk, coir and perlite.



Coconut husk is used successfully by some growers in place of bark.



Coir has a consistency similar to peat moss and is a good choice for seedlings.



Seedlings six weeks after being potted up from flats are doing well in a mix of coconut husk and perlite.



Four months after being potted in three inch pots, young plants are developing bulbs and new growths.

#3 perlite works well.

We have use the larger grade of bark, ½ inch, in a layer in the bottom of the pots to keep the finer mix from working out the drain holes in plastic pots. We have used the finer mix for seedlings in three or four inch pots as well.

We have recently changed to a different mix for all of our cymbidium and zygotetulum plants, and have potted all plants in this new mix for the past few years with very good results. Our new mix is made from coconut husk chips and #3 perlite. We use only coir for seedlings coming out of flask now and have had very good results with it.

Coir is the pith from the coconut husk which is removed from the coconut fiber used to make door mats and other fiber products. This material is similar to fine peat moss in texture, but is very resistant to breaking down and is very easy to re-wet when dry. It holds a good amount of water and contains about 30% air when saturated. Coir also re-wets very easily if it has been allowed to dry out.

The coconut husk chips are just the husk chopped into chunks in several different sizes with a fine grade about ¼ inch across, a medium grade about ⅜ inch across and a large grade that is a half inch across or larger. The coconut husk chips are usually very resistant to breaking down, although material that has not



Young plants with good roots are ready for six inch pots.

been heavily compressed works best. Chips that have been highly compressed break down quite a bit faster and hold more water, and I haven't had as good a result with these.

We use primarily three different mixes. For small plants that like to be wetter, we use a mixture of about 40% fine chips, 40% medium chips and 20% perlite. For our seedlings in three inch pots, we use 80% of either fine or medium chips with 20% #3 perlite. For six inch pots, we use 40% medium chips, 40% large chips with 20% #3 perlite. Plants in eight inch and larger pots are potted in large chips only with no perlite.

The coir/coco chip mix retains more water than an equivalent fresh bark mix, yet it contains good air spaces and does not break down quickly. Plants potted in



Roots are still healthy after two years in a coconut husk-based mix.

this mix for two years have great looking root systems with no sign of the mix breaking down. Seedlings potted in this mix do not seem to slow growth at all

and have grown significantly within six weeks of potting up from flat, with some forming the first bulbs. Seedlings in this mix often have formed good bulbs with new growths four months after potting. They have very vigorous root systems and are ready to pot up into six inch pots.

Loren Batchman has been growing cymbidiums for 40 years, and hybridizing for over 30 years. He has been an accredited AOS and CSA judge for more than 20 years. For the past 30 years, he and his wife, Nancy, have operated Casa de las Orquideas, a small orchid nursery in Solana Beach, California, specializing in high color, odd and unusual cymbidiums. They have exhibited cymbidiums and other orchids at shows for the last 37 years.

