



# Miltonia (Miltoniopsis) and Odontoglossum Cultural Notes

The Odontoglossum alliance which includes ‘The Pansy’ orchids or Miltonias are a diverse, colourful and rewarding group of plants to grow. This large group of orchids are all quite similar in their requirements and if given the right conditions they will grow vigorously and bloom annually. They are mostly smaller growing varieties and do not require large amounts of space. Flowers are long lasting and most types are easily re-

flowered year after year. Most varieties are easy to care for, do not demand much attention and are mostly disease and pest free.

The group is native to Ecuador and Colombia with most species found in the mountains in cloud forests where they are not subject to very high or low temperatures. The climate range they are found in makes many members of the alliance excellent house plants.

**Temperature:** The tolerance range varies between plants but most varieties prefer a minimum of 6°C to a maximum of 25°C although the plants can tolerate much lower and higher temperatures for short periods. Ideal temperature range is 10°C to 25°C. Indoor conditions offer more stable temperature variations than outdoors so many varieties in the Alliance can do very well indoors and some like the Miltonias are far better indoors than outdoors.

**Location:** The alliance are a shade loving plant requiring shade of about 50% to 80%. Any less shade will make the leaves red or yellow in colour. In very cold areas the plants should be kept under cover out of the winter rains, Miltonias are better indoors near windows with filtered sunlight. In milder climate like Sydney most of the group will do well under shade cloth. In tropical areas the plants should be kept in very cool and shaded spots. Most varieties will do well indoors with Miltonias being the most suited. Any spot an African Violet can grow a Miltonia will thrive and flower well. The Odont and Oncidium varieties require slightly more light than a Miltonia to flower well.

**Repotting:** The plants produce much finer roots than most other orchids and prefer a mix more like an African Violet than an orchid. A blend of 70% bark and 30% peat moss will do well, some grower use only sphagnum moss. Plants are to be repotted every 2 to 3 years as plants will have filled the pot or the soil may be souring. Repotting is best from Spring after flowering to early Autumn. Tease all roots apart removing all dead roots and shorten the live roots leaving enough to allow the plant to be anchored into the potting mix.

**Watering:** The plants should be watered well but not be allowed to sit in water. Potting media should remain moist all year round. If the media dries out soak the pot for a few minutes as dry peat moss is difficult to rewet. Most plants can tolerate drying out for long periods but will suffer and may not flower next year. Indoors Miltonias, like African Violets are often grown on trays



on pebbles with water around them. Plants grown indoors should be watered well and the water drained away. If not the plant should be placed under a dripping or running tap for a short while to flush out the mix of excess salt build up, fertilisers and organic waist.

**Fertilising:** The plants can be fed by liquid or slow release methods. Most fertilisers will do but if you can try to get a fertiliser recommended for Orchids or African Violets. The dose rate is about 50% of recommended for normal plants, liquid fertilisers should be applied every 2 to 4 weeks unless a slow release fertiliser is also in the pot.

**Flowering:** Occurs on mature growths from Spring to Autumn with a few types flowering in Winter. Some plants like the Miltonias are fast growers and can mature bulbs in less than a year. They can often reflower in the same year. A good Miltonia can flower with a number of spikes off one bulb with two spikes being very common. Some members of the alliance can produce spikes up to 1 metre tall with large numbers of flowers. Most blooms last about 3 to 5 weeks but some Miltonia’s have reported much longer periods and some cooler Odontonia’s (Miltonia x Odontoglossum) have lasted well over 10 weeks. Older specimen plants make an incredible sight. When plants are in flower avoid watering the flowers and keep plants in a drier position to extend flower life.

**Problems, pest’s and diseases:** Most members of the alliance are quite hardy and only suffer from water related infections caused by the roots staying wet too long. Extremely cold and wet winters can easily rot a bulb so plants should be kept dry and out of the rain in winter (in cold areas). Indoors if the plants take too long to dry then move them into an area of better ventilation or apply less water in the cold months. Most water related infections can be treated with Benlate, Diathane or Mancozeb. Pests like scale, mealy bug or mites should be treated like any other plant. Watch for snails and slugs if plants are grown outside as flower spikes are quickly destroyed by them. If plants do not put on growth in one year or get smaller then repotting should be carried out. If plants do not flower but look healthy they have either not matured the bulb as yet or are not receiving enough light. If the roots are damaged the plant will still flower. Often new plant leaves become crinkled when they emerge, this is not a problem, what has occurred is that the leaf, due to dry conditions sometimes get stuck in the plant before it emerges and hence gets squashed before it manages to break out.

## Varieties included in this alliance.

### The following are natural Genera

*Miltonia (Milt), Odontoglossum (Odm), Brassia (Brsa), Oncidium (Onc), Cochlioda*

### The following are some of the intergeneric hybrid groups in the alliance,

Miltonidium (Mtdm), Miltoniopsis (Milt), Miltonioda (Mtda), Willsonaria (Will), Burregaria (Burr), Odontonia (Odn), Odontocidium (Odtcm), Maclenaria (Mclna), Vuylstekeara (Vuyl), Odontioda, Beallara (Bllra), An intergeneric hybrid refers to a plant bred from 2 different genera in the alliance.

**Good growing  
Orchid World, Collectors Corner**

