**Vanda and Ascocenda Culture by Martin Motes**

## **Light**

Vandas and Ascocendas flourish in bright light but will not tolerate full sun. Pool enclosures and screened-in patios usually provide excellent areas for growing them particularly if a tree provides an additional hour or so of shade during the day. They also thrive hung from trees in places where they are shaded from the noonday sun but will get direct light until 10:00 a.m. or after 3:00 p.m. They establish themselves readily on palms which provide the idealized protection from noonday sun. Plants receiving proper light for growing and blooming should be bright apple green (like a Granny Smith apple). Plants that are yellow are in too bright a spot and plants that are too dark green grow lushly but may not flower.

#### Water

These plants love an abundance of water and high humidity particularly when temperatures are high. They enjoy South Florida’s rainy season and they should not go without water for more than 2-3 days if the temperature is above 80 degrees. In Spring or at other times when humidity is low and temperatures are high, they can be watered almost daily, typically in early to mid-morning. Vandas also profit from an occasional additional misting in hot dry weather. In winter, they require less water and should be watered only when completely dried from the last watering or rain, usually every 2-4 days when the roots have turned white again. Softening or wrinkling of the lower leaves indicates the plant is severely under-watered. The frequency of watering should be increased if this happens. In all cases the roots should be overall dark green when the watering is over. Usually this is best accomplished with 2 or 3 applications spaced apart by a few minutes. A coarse mist head or soft water breaker works best. When watering a mixed orchid collection Vandas should be watered first and then again last. This allows the roots to be thoroughly saturated.

#### Fertilizer

Vandas and Ascocendas are heavy feeders as orchids go. During warm weather when they are in rapid growth, they enjoy weekly applications of Millers or Peters 20-20-20 at the rate of 2 tsp. per gallon. Based on the Michigan State University studies, a 15-5-15 fertilizer such as Peter’s Excell is now preferred. Another strategy would lower the Phosphorus year round by alternating 20-20-20 with a mixture of Potassium Nitrate and Magnesium Sulfate each at 1 Tbs. per gal at every other weekly fertilizing. The plants need less fertilizer in winter but as they continue to grow they still be fed on 2-3 week intervals in cool weather. In March the regular fertilizer schedule can begin again. In general under all conditions Vandas should be fertilized at every 5th to 6th watering.

**Problems & Solutions**

Vandas and Ascocendas have few pests or diseases. Flower spikes and buds are occasionally attacked by thrips. These can be effectively controlled by an application of Orthene Soluble Powder. Diazinon WP or Safer’s or other liquid soap at 2 oz. per gal. is also effective. Spraying for thrips two or three times a year should also control the other major insect pests. Fungus diseases can sometimes be a problem, particularly in late summer at the end of the rainy season. Most growers spray their plants with Clareys 3336, Manzate, Captan, Truban or Banrot during this period. With good air circulation and bright light, where plants are not over crowded, fungus disease is seldom a problem.

**In Conclusion**

Vandas and Ascocendas are happiest when the temperature never falls below 50 degrees. Plants protected from cold produce many more flowers and have few insect or disease problems. They are among the easiest orchids to grow. They can be maintained in attractive slatted wooden baskets for years without repotting to become truly spectacular specimen plants.