

Versatile Sphagnum Moss

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Sphagnum moss has long been known and used in orchid culture as a media which promotes root growth in plants that have a poor root system or plants that have lost their roots completely. The usual practice was to pot the plant in sphagnum moss and when roots began to start the plant was then potted in its usual potting media.

Another method which was used mainly for exotic cattleyas was to place the rootless backbulbs in a plastic bag with some damp moss around the base of the plant, the bag was then sealed (placed in a dark location) and left until new roots became evident and then potted as above.

Nowadays sphagnum moss is used for potting a wide range of genera. Well known Sydney orchid grower, Frank Slattery, for many years imported plants from most orchid growing countries (both wild-collected and nursery-raised) and after fumigation housed them in his quarantine house. He potted every plant - regardless of genus - in sphagnum moss and ultimately sold the plants still potted in moss.

There are many sources of sphagnum moss and supplies can be had of New Zealand pelletised moss (which won't regrow) and from Aust Moss in Tasmania you can obtain dry moss which only needs water added to reconstitute it. It comes in various grades from long strand, medium stand, small for seedlings and green damp growing moss.

Some growers add perlite or polystyrene to open up the mix (or make it go further) but this is personal choice, most now use sphagnum on its own. The 'styrene mix tends to dry out a lot quicker.

There is a correct method in the potting procedure which is recommended for successful culture, and this is;

1. Wet the dry moss with quarter strength liquid fertiliser.
2. Unpot the plant to be repotted, remove any dead roots, back bulbs etc. and wash the plant of any old media adhering to the roots.
3. Squeeze the moisture from the moss with your hands until no more water comes out, the

moss is then ready for use.

4. Turn the plant upside down and work the damp moss in between and around the roots then place the plant in the pot.

5. Put your fingers inside the pot and work around the edges pressing the moss inwards to the centre of the root mass, keep adding moss and pressing until the required level is reached and moss is a fairly tight mass.

6. Do not water plant for a few days or until roots establish. It is best to only mist the top of the moss to keep it at the same moisture level as when potted.

7. IMPORTANT!!! Only use quarter strength liquid fertiliser on plants grown in moss! If you use stronger fertiliser you will end up with a green/black slime on the top of the pot. Do not use slow release fertiliser or Dynamic Lifter! Some liquid fertiliser that call he used are; Aquasol, Campbells, Peters, etc.

Other advantages in using moss is that less water and fertiliser are required, few insects take up residence in the pot and moss is much cleaner and does not break down into mud. For best results, it is advised to repot into fresh moss annually or at most every two years.

More and more nurseries and private growers are using this amazing moss with outstanding results. Most importantly it is being used on a number of "high altitude" species which were previously considered difficult subjects.

So why not try it on a few plants yourself? You may be pleasantly surprised.





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