

oncidium

ONCIDIUM on-SID-ee-um

Common | Butterflies, Dancing Ladies, Mule Ears, Turtle Shells

This large genus of over 400 species has more than its share of whimsical common names. They are widespread from Mexico south throughout Central and South America. Some grow as epiphytes on trees. Others grow on rocks or on mossy surfaces.

Flowers may be shades of yellow and brown, sometimes pink, red or white. Leaves and pseudobulbs are astonishingly varied: fan-shaped (*Oncidium pusillum*), stiff and pointed (Mule Ear orchid, *Oncidium splendidum*), long and pencil-shaped (Rat Tail orchid, *Oncidium jonesii*), flattened (Turtle Shell orchid, *Oncidium ampliatum*). Recent genetic studies suggest that this large genus may be subdivided.

Temperature | Most Oncidiums grow well in temperatures ranging from 55-65° (night) to 75-85° (day).

Light and Water | Oncidiums come from a wide variety of habitats. Over time this has influenced their morphology. Plants with thick stiff leaves (like *Oncidium splendidum*) are much more tolerant of strong light and dry conditions than are the thin-leaved Oncidiums (*Oncidium ornithorhynchum*). Most hybrids grow well with moderate amounts of light and water, and an eastern or western exposure receiving a couple of hours of sun each day is suitable.

Potting | Oncidiums need repotting when they have outgrown their pots or when the soil mix has decomposed. The best time to repot is when the new shoot is 1-3 inches tall. The Atlanta Botanical Garden uses a mix consisting of fir bark, charcoal and perlite. Mature plants prefer a medium grade bark. Seedlings do better in fine grade bark. Clay or plastic pots can be used, although clay pots offer the advantage of better air circulation around the roots.

Fertilizer | Like most orchids, Oncidiums are not heavy feeders. They can be fertilized year-round with any balanced mixture (i.e., having equal parts nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) diluted to half strength. Be sure soil is moist when fertilizer is applied.



Oncidium ampliatum

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