

# Masdevallias Cultural Notes

Peter Van Est



Masdevallias, grow right on the equator in The Andes in Peru into Middle America to South Mexico, but at high altitudes, and there for are cool growing, the ideal temperature 22 degrees at daytime, and 16 at night. But they are very forgiving and can stand temperatures in the high thirties for short periods as long as the night temperature falls down significant, otherwise the plant will look stressed within a couple of days, and always try to compensate high temperatures with high humidity. A hard task indeed, when there is a dry westerly blowing. A good way to overcome this is to grow your masdas in polystyrene boxes at least 25 to 30 cm high with the bottom removed and replaced by an

open grid made up from 1 inch welded mesh. On a warm day wet the floor of your orchid house and place the boxes on the wet floor, the temperature on the floor will be at least 2 to 3 degrees cooler then on the benches anyway. Most sensitive to heat are Masd. coccinea and their hybrids.

The opposite is true for the lower temperatures, most varieties can stand temperatures to freezing point, but again for very short periods, again some varieties are more sensitive than others. Also give them plenty of air movement.

I could not grow my masdas very satisfactorily in sphagnum moss, so I grew them in a bark mix, but because bark became very expensive, and hard to come by, I tried coco peat and with good results. It's cheap, easy to obtain and reliable, I buy every brand, ( watch out for already added fertiliser) but Orchidmate is very uniform in size and easy to use and I treat it as follows: When I use a full brick I divide it in half and soak each halve for 12 hours in about 40 litre containers (recycle bins) and spread it out on a sheet of shade cloth for about 3/4 hours, and repeat this 3 times, then I soak it again but dissolve 15g of Epsom salts, and 15g of Iron Sulphate in each container, ( stir it with a stick, otherwise the Iron Sulphate will make your nails black) and again, soak it for 12 hours, and spread it out on shade cloth again, than give it a third soak, then rinse it thoroughly on shade cloth again and let it dry out until it is dry enough for use. When you grow only a couple of masdas, use only parts of the quantities. As a rule 5g each of Epsom salts and iron sulphate to ten litres of coco fibre. When you change from spag to coco remove all moss very thoroughly.



I do my repotting in Sept. or April, give or take a few weeks, depending on the weather. When you like to show your plants, try to repot in Sept. to give the plants more time to establish before the next showing season. When a plant looks sick or is sick repot at any time. When I make a new batch of compost, I always pot a few plants (of different varieties) in transparent drinking cups, where in I make about eight 6 mm holes in the bottom for drainage, and fit

them in the right size normal pot, the reason being, that after a while I can take out the transparent pot and can check the root system and compost without disturbing the plant. When there is something wrong with an orchid it almost always start under the surface, except a fungal or insect infestation. I use the tall narrow pots for my masdas and put always about 20 mm of pebbles in the bottom of the pot for stabilisation. I start with a bit of compost in the bottom of the pot on top of the pebbles, then open up the root ball and fill it up with compost and put it in the pot, Then I pack in the compost from the bottom up to avoid pockets of air in the pot, (I use a thick skewer or piece of thin stake) pack it firm but not too tight, and soak the pot with rainwater and an hour or so later a light tea of Seasol, to start bacterial growth. Don't fertilise for the next fourteen days.



Every 7 days I give them a soluble fertilizer, and soak the compost, Peters Blue (high nitrogen) and Campbells Yellow (low nitrogen, high Potassium) I use this on a fifty 50/50 basis. 5g each in 24 litres of water. I also use liquid organic fertilizer like Seasol, Charlie Carp, Blood and Bone etc. And use it as a spray every 3 to 4 weeks, but always on a shady day. Keep them moist but not wet at all times, because they don't have pseudo bulbs for storage.



Every grower should experiment with watering and fertilizing his or her plants until the right result is achieved. Only experiment with a few plants which are not valuable.

I grow them under double about 50% shade cloth which makes it 75%.

The most common pests in masdas are snails and caterpillars. Also when a plant that according to its size should flower but refuses to do so, have a look under the sheath on the bottom of the leaf where the flower should develop, sometimes there will be a mealy bug or scale ( Bois Duval), eating all the goodies. This is the most common in the more bigger varieties. Do not remove the sheath for

no reason otherwise the flowers will come out and grow sideways, because they have no guidance. Some varieties will grow their flowers sideways anyway, I try to overcome this by putting a piece of about 25 cm( depend on the size of the plant) 80 mm stormwater pipe over the plant,

Some plants have yellow leaves, depending on the variety, but when there are only a few plants in your collection of the same variety it is of no concern. When all your plants look yellow, they might get to much light or have a deficiency, try Iron Chelate or Epsom salts.

**Peter Van Est, 2012**

