

Miltoniopsis Culture

By Sam Cowie – Leaf & Limb



Miltoniopsis or Pansy Orchids are one of the most beautiful orchids in the world, with their wide range of colours, patterns and lush flower texture. Although not one of the easiest to grow, they do grow well if certain cultural practices are followed, even in the sub-tropical areas of Southeast Queensland where most people think it's too hot. As always watch your plant, make notes and learn from how it grows and reacts to what you do.

Watering

The simple rule is keep them **moist but well drained**. The easiest way to kill your Miltoniopsis is to let it dry out or to sit it in water. Miltoniopsis like to have a cool humid environment around their roots, so the pot in pot technique works well to maintain that. As a general rule we water in the morning every second day in summer and every 4 to 6 days in winter, adjusting as per the weather conditions, potting mix, size of plant and light levels.

Growing Conditions

Miltoniopsis prefer to be grown undercover and don't like to have wet foliage going into the night, this minimises leaf diseases and helps to keep the potting mix moisture levels even. We grow our Miltoniopsis in a greenhouse with a white solarweave cover that provides a 50% shade factor. From mid-spring to mid-autumn, or during hot weather, it's best to increase the shading of your Miltoniopsis to 75%, which can be achieved by pulling across a 50% shadecloth over the top of your greenhouse (if covered in white solarweave). You want enough light to keep the foliage nice and firm, as too much shade creates long lanky and weak foliage, but not too much light that the plant overheats and stresses. Although Miltoniopsis love high humidity you still want air flow around the plant foliage to minimise leaf diseases. Our greenhouse where the Miltoniopsis grow has experienced temperatures up to 42 Celsius and down to 5 Celsius without any major effects on the plants or their growth. As a general rule during hot weather they need increased shade and humidity with good ventilation to stop the plant from stressing too much.

Fertilising

Miltoniopsis should and will be in active growth year round, so a regular fertilising program helps. Each spring apply a 12 month controlled release fertiliser like Osmocote. Supplement every second watering with a half strength liquid fertiliser high in potassium that contains calcium and magnesium, like Peters Calmag Finisher. An additional application of magnesium sulphate (Epson salts) at 1 gram per litre once every 3 or 4 weeks will also help, as Miltoniopsis like magnesium.

Repotting and Potting Mixes

Miltoniopsis prefer to be root bound in a pot, as overpotting can create moisture levels that are too wet for them. They will grow and flower in a 105mm pot and I generally don't recommend anything bigger than a 150mm squat pot for even big plants. We grow ours in a coco husk/peat and perlite mix, with a little bit of 10mm charcoal added. This mix retains more moisture than a bark mix but still needs watering every second day in summer for us. If your pH starts to drop top dress the pot with a bit of dolomite.

Pest and Diseases

The major pest is little bush snails that burrow into the potting mix and eat the root tips. Boisduval scale will bother them if the plant is in poor condition, otherwise the occasional mealy bug or caterpillar will cause damage. Your garden centre usually stocks the appropriate insecticide.

Flowering

Although most Miltoniopsis flower in Spring and Summer, we find that Miltoniopsis will flower sporadically year round. Well grown Miltoniopsis will have 2 spikes per growth with 5 to 8 flowers on each spike.