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Photo by R. F. Leaney

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Growing Ground Orchids

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This statement covers a large number of species, for wherever we travel we are usually sure of finding some type of the "Groundies" present. The writer only intends to discuss the method he has found to be successful.

The compost, in which the orchids are to grow, being the all important question, will be discussed first. A mixture is made of black sandy leaf mould, that found under trees in sandstone country is ideal, and soil from the natural habitat of the plant. This soil or loam varies with the genus one is dealing with, and experience will show the grower how much to use. It is thought better to have the mixture a bit on the sandy side to start with, than have it too heavy. To this mixture is added a small part of very old cow manure (powdered). The manure can be left out if not available.

This mixture can be used with success for any of the following genera:

Pterostylis (Greenhoods), *Caladenia* (Spider or other type), *Corybas* (Helmet orchids), *Cryptostylis* (Tongue orchids), *Caleana* (Duck orchid), *Spiranthes* (Ladies' tresses), *Acianthus* (Gnat or Pixie caps). In fact, it can be used with confidence as a basis for any of our terrestrial orchids.

Where plants are found to like a heavier type of soil, the compost is to contain a much larger percentage of the original loam that the plant was collected in, together with a proportion of well-rotted leaf mould. Such plants belong to the genera *Thelymitra* (Sun orchids), *Glossodia* (Wax Lip orchid), *Prasophyllum* (leek leafed orchid) and *Diuris* (Double Tails).

Potting is of importance as one has to provide perfect drainage. Take your pot, usually a 3 or 4 inch is large enough. Place a large "crock" over the drainage hole and then add about one inch of granulated charcoal or small chips of old pots, the former being preferred. Add about two inches of compost. The tubers can now be spaced around the pot allowing plenty of room for the plants to multiply. Some of the *Pterostylis* may make up to four new tubers per year. Now the pot can be topped off with compost.

Watering is another important thing to attend to. Overwatering must be avoided at all costs, and it is much better to underwater a plant if in doubt of its dampness. The pot should be kept moist at all periods of the plant's growth however. When the dormant period arrives the compost should be gradually dried off. Dipping is the preferred method of watering.

Repotting should be carried out every year, after giving the plants seven or eight weeks from flowering to harden off their new tubers. This period of drying out varies with different genera. If the tuber is left three to four weeks after the green part of the plant has disappeared, it should be ready to repot.

Shading—this point is one to watch, and the best way to overcome the problem is to take notice of this feature in the plant's natural habitat. If it is found in the full sun as are *Thelymitra* and *Diuris* then they should be placed in the sunniest end of the bush house and the reverse for the shade lovers, the *Pterostylis*, *Corybas*, and such. For those people not possessing a bush house, a position of semi-shade would be right for the shade plant, and for the sun lovers, a position beside a shrub or under trees where the tree shelters the plants from the mid-day heat, for these plants like their tubers to be kept cool. If an outside position is used, more care will be required in watering as pots will dry out much faster than in the bush house. Draughts must also be avoided; the more sheltered the position is the better.

Manure is usually a controversial subject with all orchid growers and probably no two would agree to the same thing, but it has been noted that at least two of the above genera (*Pterostylis*, *Cryptostylis*) show marked benefit from an occasional dose of weak liquid fowl or cow manure. Both plants show a marked increase in root growth and in larger flowers.

It has also been found that *Pterostylis* will do equally well in the following two mixtures, tan bark *Cymbidium* compost, and a mixture of sandy loam, leaf mould and chopped tree fern fibre. The main thing to remember is that they must be provided with perfect drainage.

Terrestrial orchids can be removed at any period of their growth, but preferably just as the plant breaks ground. Tubers vary in depth. It appears to be governed by two things (a) climatic conditions and (b) soil condition. The harder the soil the shallower the tubers usually, but they rarely go deeper than three inches. A sturdy trowel or fork seem the best tools for the job and should be inserted a little away from the plant. It is most important to remove the tuber intact. The soil is then carefully broken away from the tuber and stem which should be kept moist and not allowed to dry out.

