

## Growing Masdevallia & Dracula Orchids ~ by Theresa Hill

**Masdevallias and Draculas** have a wide geographical distribution. The Masdevallias, being more diverse in their cultural requirements, are found at low and high elevations. Because of this great diversity, it is possible through careful selection to have Masdevallias and Draculas in bloom throughout the year. Masdevallias and Draculas are compact and attractive plants, even when not in bloom. A good number of plants can be grown in a relatively small area. They can be grown in a cool spot in the intermediate house, along with Odontoglossums and Cymbidiums in the cool house, or indoors under lights with great success. These beautiful jewels, the rage of the Victorians, are finding new favor among orchid enthusiasts.

**Temperature and Light** - Masdevallias and Draculas prefer night temperatures of 45°F to 55°F and 55°F to 65°F during the day. At these temperatures Masdevallias and Draculas can be grown outdoors in northern California for most of the year. We have grown our collection of Draculas outdoors in a shade house from May 15, until mid to late October here in Portland, Oregon. During the summer when temperatures are above 70°F, the Draculas are misted frequently although not directly. Should the temperature rise above 75°F, the mist system is left on until the temperature drops. The louvers are left open in the greenhouse for the Masdevallias throughout the summer and whenever possible. The basement is an ideal place to grow Masdevallias and Draculas because of the unique thermodynamics of the concrete walls. They offer a cool haven in summer and warmth in winter. Small spot fans should be employed to keep air moving around plants. Basement windows should be opened whenever possible to admit fresh air.

**Watering and Feeding** - While it is virtually impossible to over-water the draculas, care must be employed with the Masdevallias. If they are kept too wet, bacterial rot can quickly take its toll on the collection. Allow the Masdevallias to dry on the surface of the pots before watering again. During the summer when temperatures are high, water in the mornings and mist early afternoon when possible to keep the temperature cool and humidity high. For basement and indoor culture, mist the Masdevallias and Draculas every morning. The Dracula baskets should be set in shallow pans filled with water. Plastic margarine containers are ideal for this purpose. The water is drawn up by capillary action. An average year round intensity of 1000 1500 foot candles is sufficient for good growth and flower production. Bright sunlight and high temperature in combination is very harmful to Masdevallias and Draculas. During the summer months the plants must be shaded. The Draculas can be suspended under a bench during the summer as they require very low light intensity. All shading is removed by the first of November and reapplied the first or second week of February. For basement and indoor light culture, Sylvania Gro lux wide spectrum tubes are used in eight foot lengths. For good growth and flower production, 12 15 watts per square foot is ideal.

**Humidity and Air** - Humidity is an important factor often overlooked. Paphiopedilums will do well with 40 to 60% humidity. More is required when the temperatures are higher. Good fresh air movement is always a benefit to living things. Plants are no exception.

**Potting** - There are many different potting mix blends. For all seedlings in community pots to 2" pot size we use a mix consisting of seedling bark with some sponge roc added for good drainage. For plants in 4" pot size or larger we use a mix consisting of one 5 gallon bucket of Medium bark, one 5 gallon bucket of seedling bark, and two 1 gallon pots of sponge roc. Whatever your choice, plants benefit from repotting. When the medium breaks down, roots begin to rot, flower size and productivity drops off. Paphiopedilums respond well to repotting every year or two. If you add fertilizers to your mix by drench feeding you will need to repot annually.

**Orchid Ailments** - Paphiopedilums are relatively free of pests and diseases. Slugs and snails are always the most common problem with any orchid. We do recommend the A.O.S. handbook, "Orchid Pests and Diseases" available from The American Orchid Society.

Growing Masdevallia and Dracula Orchids ~ by Theresa Hill

More information can be found at <http://www.hillsviegardens.com>