

Brassias - Spider Orchids

by Steve Waters

Brassias are highly intriguing and spectacular orchids that always draw much attention and comment at orchid shows with their many flowered, well aligned rows of large spider-like blooms. In reality, they are easy to grow and in the future we can expect to see a wider range of coloured forms.

The genus *Brassia* contains approximately 40 species and is part of the *Oncidiinae* subtribe. This genus occurs in nature in Central America and in the northern part of South America, with one species, *Brs. caudata*, occurring in Florida.

Suitability for SE Queensland. Brassias are tropical orchids in the latitude range from 25 degrees North to about 15 degrees South. Fortunately for us in SE Qld, these orchids occur at an elevation of up to 1700 m which allows them to adapt easily to SE Qld's cooler Winters. Brassias are considered ideal plants for beginners in SE Qld. Repot only when a new growth is about to produce a flush of new roots.

Watering and Media Brassias normally grow as epiphytes on moss covered trees in humid forests (low altitude rainforests) where the humidity is high all year around. Rainfall is heavy most of the year, and even in the short and drier Winter period, plants receive moisture from heavy mists and dews. Brassias, thus, should not dry out for extended periods. Suitable mixes are those that retain some moisture. My mix is 50% sphagnum moss and 50% crushed polystyrene. Hybrids containing *Brassia* such as *Alicearas*, *Bratonias*, etc are grown similarly.

Light These orchids grow in exposed positions and require adequate filtered light to grow well and in particular to flower well. 50% shade cloth seems ideal.

Pest and Diseases The most significant pest problem comes from mealy bugs and scale which can grow into large colonies under the leaves if left undetected. Systemic insecticides may be needed. Some Brassias suffer from brown tip die back on the end of leaves. These tips should be removed and disposed of. Many *Oncidiinae* orchids suffer from spotting under the leaves. This can be controlled to some extent by the regular use of

Phosphorous Acid.

Brassias are vigorous growers and require ample light, moisture, humidity and nutrients. They have wonderful specimen potential, but unfortunately some (*Brs. verrucosa*, *Brs. gireoudiana*, *Brs. arcuigera* and hybrids such as *Brs. Rex*) grow into unmanageable plants very quickly and need constant repotting. Other species such as *Brs. pumila*, *Brs. keiliana* and *Brs. caudata* are more medium sized plants and still make great specimens.



Pictured above Top: *Brassia verrucosa* Middle: *Brs. keiliana* Below: *Brassia verrucosa*