

Growing Coelogyne

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General - There are about 150 species in Coelogyne (usually abbreviated to Coel.), and they come from the area around India, Asia, PNG, the Philippines and in between. Many are hardy growers that tolerate out Sydney winters quite well, but unfortunately others would need a heated glasshouse. You need to know which is which and be selective. Having said that though, the ones you can grow easily are beautiful orchids and easily acquired because they are so prolific growers and multiply well. There are generally divisions of plants available for sale at society meetings and orchid shows.

If I could mention just 5 hardy, cold growers to buy, they would be the species *Coel. cristata*, *C. flaccida*, *C. tomentosa*, and *C. ovalis* and the hybrid *C. Unchained Melody*. All are shady, moist growers that do well grown in a hanging basket once they are big enough. Don't be in a rush with fresh divisions or small plants though. They don't appreciate being overpotted in too large a container. They will grow to a large plant when managed and left undivided.

The pick of the 5 mentioned above would be *Coelogyne cristata* (pictured right) which has an arching to pendent 20 to 30cm raceme of up to 10 crystalline white, slightly floppy, 8 to 10cm flowers with yellow in the lip. There are different clones available with slightly different characteristics but this species pseudobulbs are often quite spaced apart on a creeping rhizome and when grown in a basket, it is normal for the plant to dangle chains of bulbs and rhizome out over the edges of the basket. In full flower this is a really lovely orchid.



This species is from the Himalayas area, Assam, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Java. It occurs in moderate elevations of 1500 to 2600 meters in montane forests. It is an epiphyte growing on mossy trees or on exposed rock outcrops. In the wild they have year round fog and mist and a very bright winter but shadier in summer. It is never hot at those elevations however.

Coel. flaccida – This is one of the cool growing types. It is an epiphyte in rain forests at elevations of 900 to 2000 meters. It is found in northern India, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and southern China. It is usually white with a bit of yellow and brownish orange in the lip, but there are more cream coloured forms.

This is another great orchid for Sydney growers and quickly grows into a pot or basket full of fairly tightly crowded bulbs. The flowers spikes aren't too long, perhaps 25cm or so, but each pendent spike carries from 5 to 10 flowers of about 4 or 5 cm diameter. It requires reasonable shade and regular water in the growing season, with a slightly dryer time in winter. It is so tough and grows so well in Sydney that there are regularly spare divisions available on the sales table, and ready availability means they are also usually relatively cheap.

Coelogyne flaccida is an orchid best left undisturbed for a few years to make a specimen of it. If you do this and feed it well, it rewards you with a fantastic show.



Coelogyne Unchained Melody is the hybrid between *cristata* and *flaccida*. For many years this hybrid was generally

referred to as *Coelogyne intermedia* because it certainly does look about intermediate between its parents it turns out that the name *C. Intermedia* is actually the registered name of the hybrid between *cristata* and *tomentosa* and this hybrid looks nothing like the other.

Unchained Melody is really a great orchid. The flowers are not quite as large or as full as *cristata*, but they are still 8-9 cm diameter and you can get up to 7 to 9 on each raceme. It is also tougher and easier to flower than either parent.

The flower spikes are arching to pendent, about half way between the parents, making it another that is perfectly suited to growing in a hanging basket where the flowers can display beautifully around the sides. In my own conditions, I have found that *Unchained Melody*,

and both its parents for that matter, do well in peat and perlite. They seem to thrive on the more evenly available moisture this medium provides. They take the cold, so even if you don't have a formal shadehouse, you can grow this one quite well hanging under a tree in your backyard if it gives at least light shade throughout the year and you can keep the water up to it while it is growing. Water well baskets might be worth a try.



Coelogyne ovalis – Found in Assam, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Xizang and Yunnan provinces of China, NE India, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. It occurs on trees or rocks at elevations of 600 to 2100 m.

It is a somewhat less visually imposing than the others but the individual flowers are still quite pretty. The plant tends to make wide flat tangled mats. The short 10cm spikes carry 2 flower each and the 3 to 4cm flowers can be cream, brown or green with a fringed lip in brown. It blooms in the summer through winter on a slender with successively opening, lovely fragrant flowers. This is certainly a plant best left undisturbed for a while to let it grow to a decent size clump.



Coelogyne tomentosa - This is a little less commonly available than the others . It is a species is from the mountainous regions of Malaysia, Sumatra, Borneo, and Java in river valleys at elevations of 1150 to 2100 meters and in montane forests on higher ridges. It is a cool to cold growing epiphyte (on trees) with elongate-conical, somewhat angled pseudobulbs, green when young and turning yellowish green and wrinkled with age. The bulbs have a single, pleated, long stemmed leaf.

It is variable in its flowering but most often occurring in the summer. The flowers are scented and do not last overly long. The long 35cm pendent spike dangles over the side of the pot and carries 20 to 30 pretty creamy yellow flowers with a brown lip. The flowers have narrow segments making them a little star shapes but each flower is about 6cm diameter.

This species is often marketed under its older name Coel. massangeana. They are one and the same.

Potting – all of these like a medium with a mix of size components (barks) but perhaps favouring the small to medium size. Some throw in some perlite for water retention but I don't like to mix bark and perlite so I don't. They have a seasonal growing pattern. Usually flowering in spring or summer and starting a new seasons growth around the same time. In a perfect situation you would aim to pot/repot around the time the new shoots are starting make some real progress (3 to 6inches tall but still just a leafy shoot at that stage. However, if needs must, repot anytime they are actively growing in the summer. Just avoid the really hot spells we have and be as careful and gentle as you can to try and not damage any of the new roots or shoots while you are doing it.