Oncidium
on-SID-ee-um

This is an extraordinarily large and diverse New World genus with an equally
diverse number of habitats. Oncidiums may originate anywhere from sea level
in the tropics to the high elevations of the Andes. This obviously makes cultural
generalizations difficult. More specific instructions may be available from the
grower. Some genera included are Aspasia, Brassia, warm-growing mittonias
(often called the Brazilian type) and many of their hybrids. Rat-tail and mule-ear
species have been segregated as Trichocentrum and the equitant to Tolumnia.

LIGHT needs can vary from bright to
nearly full direct sun depending on the
species. Most will thrive with one to several
hours of sun a day. Generally, thicker-
leaved plants, such as "mule-ear" and
"equitant" oncidiums, can stand more light.
In a greenhouse, 20 to 60 percent shade is
required, or about 2,000 to 6,000 foot-
candles, depending on the plants. In the
home, east, south or west windows are ideal.
Many types of oncidiums will grow under
artificial light. Four fluorescent tubes sup-
plemented with incandescent bulbs and
placed 6 to 12 inches over the plants are
necessary for proper growth. Metal-halide
and sodium-vapor bulbs also provide suffi-
cient light without needing to be so close
to the plants.

HUMIDITY should be between 30 and
60 percent. Many oncidiums require less
humidity than other orchids. Most green-
houses have adequate humidity. In the
home, placing the plants above moist pebbles
in trays is ideal.

FERTILIZE regularly while plants are
actively growing. Applications of 30-10-10
formulations twice a month are ideal for
plants in a bark-based potting medium. A
20-20-20 formulation should be used on
plants in other media or on slabs. If skies
are cloudy, applications once a month are
sufficient.

POTTING should be done when new
growth is about one-half mature, which is
usually in the spring. Fine-grade potting
media are usually used with fine-rooted
plants and coarser mixes with large-rooted
plants; the standard size is medium grade.
The plant should be positioned in the pot
so that the newest growth is farthest away
from the edge of the pot, allowing the
maximum number of new growths before
crowding the pot. Spread the roots over a
cone of potting medium and fill in around
the roots. Firm the medium around the
roots. Keep humidity high and the potting
medium dry until new roots form.

Equitant and mule-ear oncidiums, as well
as other fleshy-leaved or large-rooted
plants, can be grown on slabs of cork bark
or tree fern or in pots filled with a coarse,
well-drained medium such as charcoal.
This allows the drying between waterings
that these types need.