

Pterostylis curta Culture

This is a very easy and rewarding plant to grow, if you just note the differences between it (which comes from temperate Australia and New Zealand, climate similar to ours) and all the other (mostly tropical) orchids that you grow. Unlike the tropical orchids that go dormant, this one does its growing in the fall and winter, then as it becomes warm and dry in the spring and summer, it goes dormant.

The new growths are starting to develop in September or October. In approximately January (can be a little earlier or later depending on weather and when they were actually brought out of dormancy) the flower spikes will grow and bloom. Then, in mid to late spring, the leaves will begin to turn brown and wither. When that occurs (some time from April to early or mid-June) stop watering, put the pot someplace where you can forget about it for awhile. Then, around mid to late July (or early August, timing is not particularly critical) it's time to repot.

Spread newspaper on a table top, and dump out all the medium from the pot. Put on your reading glasses. You may want to have a cup available for the little white bulbs, which may range in size from a bee-bee to a ball bearing, occasionally as large as a marble. They may look a lot like the pieces of perlite, so look carefully. They tend to multiply – this pot probably has 7-10 bulbs, but when you repot, you could easily have twice as many if the plant is happy. Once you are sure that you picked out all the little bulbs (spread the mix around, search carefully) they are ready to pot. (You may want to save the old mix, put in a different container and water it... if you missed any, they'll sprout) Use a fast-draining potting soil such as cactus mix; the stuff from Home Depot still stays pretty wet and dense, so perhaps add bit of sand and some fine perlite to lighten it up and make it faster-draining. Put a layer of the moist soil mix on the bottom of the pan, around an inch deep (a bit of screen or shade cloth may be helpful to keep it from washing through the holes), then distribute the bulbs. If the pot was full when at maximum growth, you may want to go to a larger pot if there are more bulbs. If any have already sprouted, the top grows before the roots, so the green tip needs to point up. If they are just little round bulbs, the plant will figure out which way is up when it sprouts. Then cover the bulbs to about 1/2"-1". Shallow pot is best - they are not deep-rooted. If you don't repot each year, some bulbs will be near the bottom, and be likely to sprout out of the holes in odd directions.

Keep the soil gently damp until the new sprouts appear. Then you can water a little more (not soggy, but don't let it go dry when growing. The plant should be grown in a fairly shady area - on the north side of the house, where they don't get any direct sun, is ideal.

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