

TOP CUTTING VANDA ORCHIDS

Vanda orchids are a monopodial growing plant, which put simply means that they continue to grow vertically up a single stem, getting longer. This is somewhat different to many other orchids that produce rhizomes growing across a pot or host, moving in a horizontal direction. Most rhizome growing orchids have two eyes or growth points on each rhizome, allowing growth from either point should the need arise. However, a Vanda orchid is very different to this.

As a Vanda plant grows, new leaves become visible at the top of the plant. As it continues to mature the stem grows and the plant becomes taller. This produces a healthy plant with the leaves spreading to both sides of the stem, producing a fan-like appearance. As seen in picture 1, a Vanda plant should have leaves from the growing top of the plant all the way to the base just above the potting media or host material. This however is not always the case...

So what happens when something goes wrong and the plant drops the lower leaves? The simple answer is that you end up with a plant which looks and is often described as a 'Palm Tree' (as seen in picture 2). When this occurs it gives the appearance of poor culture, making the plants look scraggily. However you can take action to restore them to their fan-like glory.

So what causes this 'Palm Tree' effect? The most common cause is cold weather – if the plant is exposed to the cold it will naturally drop the lower leaves. This does not mean that the plant is sick but simply it has been placed under stress by the conditions. Other causes can be more problematic and may be fungal or bacterial in nature. This would require the underlying cause to be treated before any remedial work is undertaken and if you are unsure you should seek assistance from experienced growers. It is my experience however that most fungal or bacterial problems affect the new top growth rather than causing the bottom leaves to drop. Once the damage is done however it is irreversible and the effect is the 'Palm Tree' look.

Top cutting Vanda Orchids is one way of correcting the 'Palm Tree' problem. As Vanda Orchids grow taller they often produce additional roots from various points up the stem (as seen in picture 3). In nature these new roots would attach to the host tree or rock forming a new anchor point for the plant, allowing it to continue to thrive in its upright natural way. Luckily for the orchid enthusiast, this gives us the opportunity to remove the bottom of the plant effectively shortening the stem and bringing the lowest leaves back to the pot or host. Provided the plant has grown new roots up the stem this is easily done by cutting through the stem completely. It is preferable to leave a minimum of four new, well established roots attached to the top of the plant. The cut should be on an angle so that water does not gather and allow fungus or similar problems to occur. It is best to complete this when the roots are actively growing with green tips. Once done I like to seal the cut with either some Steri-Prune or a paste of fungicide and allow it to sit to dry for a day or so before repotting

into the new media or attaching to the new host. I find this limits the stress to the plant and it continues to grow as if nothing had happened.

The older base of the plant can either be discarded, or kept to see if it will produce any side growths forming a new plant. Should a new shoot occur, this can continue to be grown until it produces its own roots and can then be removed from the original stem using cutters or a sharp instrument and potted on (as per picture 4).

Some plants however, will not produce any new roots up the stem which creates a problem, as cutting the top off the stem without roots is asking for trouble. In this case, root growth can be encouraged by cutting approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ way through the stem and applying some rooting hormone. I like to place a thin plastic tag soaked in the hormone into the cut and leave it there, as this seems to work well for me (as seen in picture 5). Within a few months, if all goes well, some new roots will appear and once sufficient growth has occurred the normal procedure above can be undertaken. Just a tip here, ensure that the top of the plant is well supported before cutting half way through the stem or your plant may break prematurely.

By following these simple techniques you can have beautiful plants with full leaf growth just as nature intended and be the envy of your orchid growing buddies.

Happy growing.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5