

Laelia purpurata – How I Grow That

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My particular plant is *L. purpurata* 'Estiata' x 'Venosa'. It produces a spectacular set of blooms once annually in either May or June that last almost a month. When the blooms first open, the petals and sepals are pale lavender, but they fade to a bright white within a few days. The labellum is tightly rolled with deep magenta on the lip changing to yellow in the throat.

I have experienced some difficulties growing it in my home environment and I almost lost the plant when I first repotted it a couple of years ago. It just did not seem to want to grow new roots. I discovered that the roots were not healthy at the time I purchased it, damaged apparently by scale that required several treatments and repottings to eliminate. I have successfully reestablished it in the new pot where it is vigorously growing new roots, and generally two new pseudobulbs each year.

Light

I grow this plant in an East facing window box in my den. It receives early morning sunshine from sunrise until after 11am each day. The light is often diffused by Nipomo's morning fog cover. This is also the first room in the house to warm up each day. I do not shade the plant, and it appears to enjoy all the sunlight it can get. If grown in a South or West facing window, I'd probably shade the window with a sheer curtain to prevent sunburn.

Water & Fertilizer

I generally water and fertilize all my potted plants once each week. That computes to once every 6 to 8 days. I use RO water mixed with ½ teaspoon of Grow More 20-20-20 per gallon. I water each plant heavily at the sink, which gives me a weekly opportunity to inspect each plant closely. About once every 2 months, I flush each plant with copious quantities of tap water to flush out any salt build up in the potting medium. I use Potassium Chloride in our water softening system, which allows me to do this. During the winter, I sometimes skip watering this plant for a week depending on how rainy it's been and how damp the potting mix is. The plant is almost dormant during the winter months.

Temperatures & Air Flow

Our home generally is very stable, with a daily temperature swing of less than 10 degrees during the winter and 15 degrees during the summer. We average 60 – 70F during the winter months and 65 – 75 during the summer. I would guess the house median temp is 70 degrees year around. The windows are open almost all year around during our waking hours, providing a steady breeze through the plants in the window box. As Nipomo is often foggy in the evening through early morning, the breezes are cool and damp. If you need to close your windows, use an oscillating fan on low to keep air moving around your plants. You could grow this plant successfully outdoors most of the year. I'd move it inside December through March.

Potting Mix

The plant is currently in 100% medium fir bark; however, I intend to change that to a mix of 3 parts medium coconut chips and 1 part #3 perlite when I next repot this plant. Repotting should be done immediately following the blooming as this is when the plant starts growing new pseudobulbs. The plant grows little or nothing during the winter.

It is currently in a 6" round, clear plastic pot. I prefer clear plastic as I can visually see root condition, moisture content, and openness of the potting medium through the pot. I also believe that the roots grow healthier and photosynthesize when exposed to sunlight.

