**GROWING YOUR FIRST DISA**

(in particular Disa unfiflora and its hybrids)

The following notes are given to help you to grow and enjoy your first Disa.

Disa (dee-zah) are often described as the most beautiful terrestrial orchid in the world. Disas are native to the Republic of South Africa where they grow at the edges of small streams which descend the western slopes of Table Mountain, their roots penetrating the perpetually moist mat of fern and erica roots, their foliage exposed to the sun and wind. In Australia, Disa flower from November to March.

**Housing**

Disa may be successfully grown in a cool greenhouse or similar, in frost free areas a shade house will suffice. Disa require plenty of fresh moist air and bright filtered sunlight. These exciting orchids can withstand -3ºC air temperature however direct frost may burn the plants and temperatures above 37ºC should be avoided. 50% shading conditions during summer is also most beneficial.

**Repotting**

Disa are somewhat different to other orchids. Each plant grows from an annual tuberoid. At the completion of the seasons growth whether flowering or not, the old plant dies but not before a new plant is formed. Other new plants may form at this time, hence Disa will multiply with good culture.

Repotting is best done in the autumn with March being the ideal month. Great care should be exercised as the roots and tubers are very brittle and fragile. Sphagnum moss is an ideal medium. As long as the sphagnum moss remains in good condition, these plants may be left undisturbed for 2 years when repotting may become necessary.

**Watering**

These spectacular orchids must be thought of, and treated as semi-bog plants, rather than the conventional cultural methods that are practised with other orchids, that is, they must not be allowed to dry out at any time, while at the same time they must not be allowed to be kept saturated all of the time. As the water drains from the pot air will replace it. This is important as these orchids like to have ‘cool feet’ at all times. Good quality water is also important.

Rain water is ideal. Municipal water with high pH and chlorine content can be fatal. If you think there is too much chlorine in your water, let a bucket of water sit overnight and the chlorine will evaporate.

There is no necessity to use fertilizers, while these plants are growing in sphagnum moss.

**Pests and Diseases**

Disa are troubled by very few pests, slugs and snails are most commonly encountered they do not appear to attack the leaves or stems of Disa but enjoy the buds leaving nasty perforations on the blooms. These are easily controlled with commercial baits.

**Growth and Flowering**

The Disa will indicate its intention to flower about September/October by the extension of growths from the centre of the plant. After flowering this growth will gradually die. The side growths will become the plant for the following year, at the same time, a number of small rhizome extensions or stolons will be very active below the surface during February to April. It is not unusual, for some of these growths to immerge from the drainage holes of the pot.

