

# Planting & Caring for Lady's-slipper Orchids

## **Selecting a suitable planting location:**

Lady's-slippers are hardy, native, woodland orchids and grow best in part shade. The north side of a building or the dappled sun of mature trees will provide them the protection they need. Ferns prefer a similar environment to hardy orchids. Be careful not to plant your orchids too close to trees or aggressive shrubs. Lady's-slippers require regular moisture and are not aggressive enough to compete with larger woody plants for water and nutrients.

## **Soil:**

Lady's-slippers are tolerant of most garden soils provided they are well drained and not compacted. Dense or heavy soils should be amended with peat moss and sand or perlite. If your soil tends to be wet or soggy, build up the planting site to provide proper drainage with a good quality soil mix that has a blend of black dirt, peat moss, sand and manure. Our soil mix is perfect for hardy orchids. Lightly covering the soil surface after planting with a shredded wood/bark mulch or peat moss will help keep the conditions favorable for proper root establishment and moisture retention.

## **Planting:**

Planting depth is very important for the health of your new plant. Do not make the mistake of planting too deeply. Lady's-slippers are a rhizome which means they don't have a fibrous root system, like some perennials. Because of this much or all of the potting mix may fall away from the rhizome and roots when you remove them from their pot. ~ That's okay! ~ Just discard the potting mix or blend it into the planting site and follow these guidelines for proper planting depth. The rhizome should be planted 1" below the soil surface with the shoot buds or shoots pointing upward and the roots spread out radially to a depth of 4". If your orchid retains the potting mix when you remove it from its pot you can be sure that we have planted it at the proper depth. Plant the root ball so that the top of the potting mix is even with the surrounding soil. Water thoroughly once planted.

## **Plant care:**

Water regularly to keep your soil evenly moist, but never soggy. They don't like to dry out completely but too much moisture too frequently will cause rot and decay. In the spring your Lady's-slipper orchid has a high need for nutrients and it is important to fertilize them. We recommend Osmocote, a well-balanced time release fertilizer. This will promote strong growth and future success as the care they receive this year determines their vigor and bloom next year. After they bloom they don't require the same levels of nutrients. Important Notes: If you have yellowish green leaves you may have a nutrient deficiency or be exposing your orchids to too much sun. Orchid fertilizers do not provide enough nutrients for our hardy, native orchids.

Once the shoots die back **completely** in fall, remove them by pulling them out diagonally from the ground. Don't cut them off unless absolutely necessary as this could promote rot. It is beneficial to divide your orchid clumps every few years to keep them vital and healthy.

## **Protecting your new plant(s):**

Orchids are especially vulnerable to slugs in springtime. When conditions are right slugs can destroy whole orchid plants in one night. Protect them from slug damage by applying Sluggo to your shaded planting beds. This keeps the slug and snail populations in check.

## **Lady's-slipper companion plants:**

Ferns, Hosta, Sedge, Woodland Phlox, Bergenia, Azaleas, Rogersia, Fern-leaved Dicentra.



# Dividing established Lady's-slipper Orchids

## When to divide:

After a number of years an established clump of Lady's-slippers may begin to die out in the center. The dead tissue can cause rot which can spread to the rest of the clump eventually killing the entire plant. To avoid this we recommend you divide your Lady's-slippers every 3 or 4 years. September is the best time to divide Lady's-slippers just after the shoots have died back.

## The 5 steps to successful division:

1. Dig up the entire clump and wash off all the soil from the roots with cold water.
2. Remove the dead shoots. For Yellow Lady's-slipper pull the shoots sideways to remove them. - (Do Not Pull up) We recommended pulling the shoots rather than cutting them to prevent any remaining tissue from rotting which could spread to the rest of the plant.

Showy Lady's-slipper shoots don't always pull easily. If this is the case you may have to cut the shoots of the Showy Lady's-slipper to remove them.

3. Once all the dead shoots have been removed, use cold water to wash the soil out of the crown being extra thorough on the underside of the clump and rhizome.
4. This part can require some muscle. Bend the clump back and forth looking/feeling for a weak spot in the middle of the rhizome where it breaks. -This won't harm the plant, promise. Try to end up with a few shoot buds on each division. If the clump is so dense that it cannot be bent or broken by hand you may have waited too long before dividing it. In this situation you will need to use a knife to cut the rhizome, even though it is not the preferred method of dividing.
5. Then, carefully tease the two pieces apart with your hands loosening the roots from one another in the process. Don't be too aggressive when pulling the clump apart. Avoid tearing the roots or breaking off any of the viable shoot buds.

Well Done!

You are ready to replant your divided clumps.

