



St. Augustine Orchid Society

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Repotting Bifoliates Keith Davis Style

by Sue Bottom, sbottom15@hotmail.com

If you grow cattleyas, you've been told that unifoliate cattleyas can be repotted any time, but bifoliate cattleyas are very persnickety about repotting. These cattleyas, particularly the species bifoliate, often initiate new roots only once during the year and if you repot outside this narrow window, your bifoliate cattleya may sulk or jump off the cliff in protest. So what do you do when you notice your bifoliate cattleya is doing poorly in a degraded potting mix with no green root tips in sight?



While watering, I noticed this *C. amethystoglossa* was unhappy with wilted pseudobulbs and leaves.



The potting mix 2 inches deep in the pot was degraded and the plant was very wobbly in the pot.

The conventional wisdom is that when you have a severely degraded potting mix, you restrict water to the plant until you see the new roots and can safely repot. The idea is that the roots are already being smothered because the rotting media is restricting air movement around the roots and the mix dries out much more slowly than fresh mix. Unfortunately, I am incapable of watching my plants slowly die and needed another approach...Keith Davis to the rescue!

Keith Davis from Reidsville, North Carolina is a cattleya aficionado who shared a lot of his orchid growing tips with our club, including this one on repotting bifoliate. His approach is



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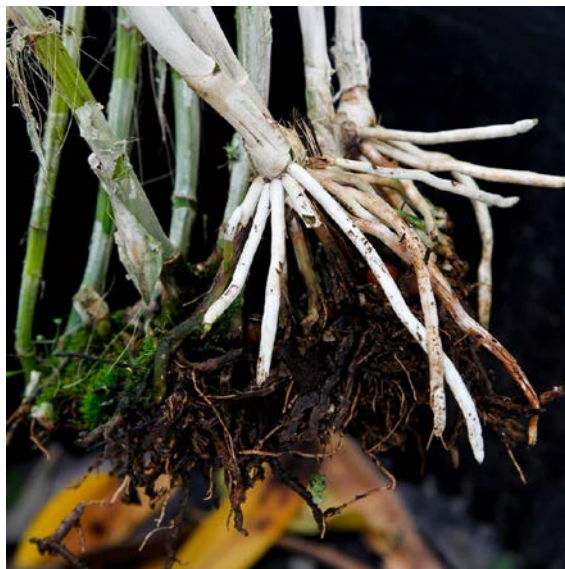
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to strip away the old mix and secure the plant on top of a bed of lava rock with no potting mix around the roots. Then you wait until the plant is ready to throw off its new roots.

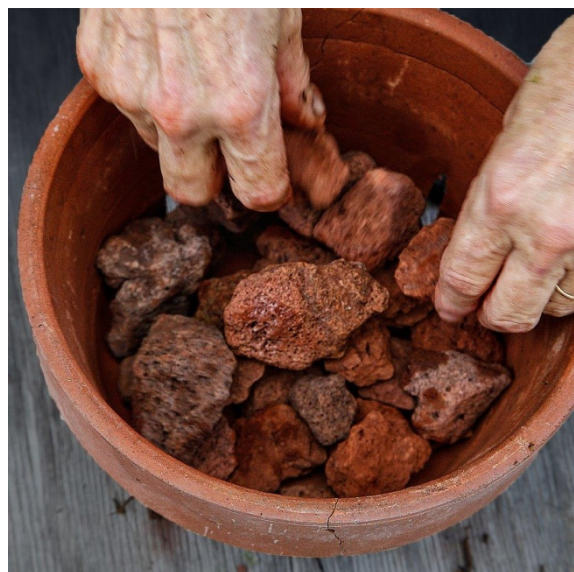
Secure Your Bifoliate in a Pot with Some Lava Rock and Wait for Your Roots to Grow



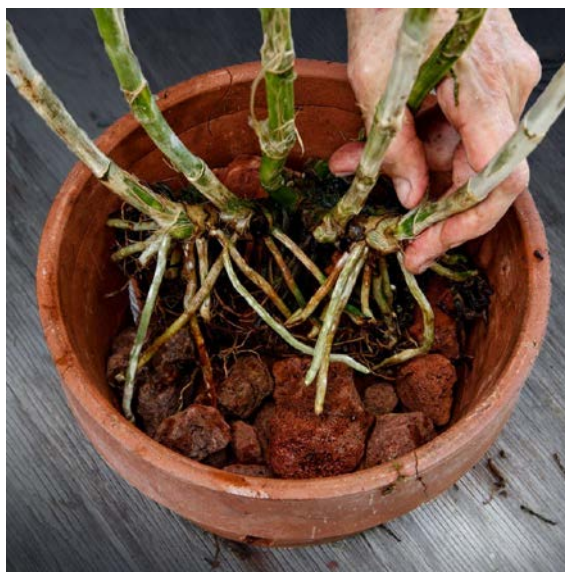
One look at the roots and you know this isn't going to be pretty.



No wonder the plant looked so unhappy, those roots were screaming for air.



Make a layer of large chunks of lava rock two or three deep in the pot.



Set the plant on top of the lava rock and leave the roots open to the air.

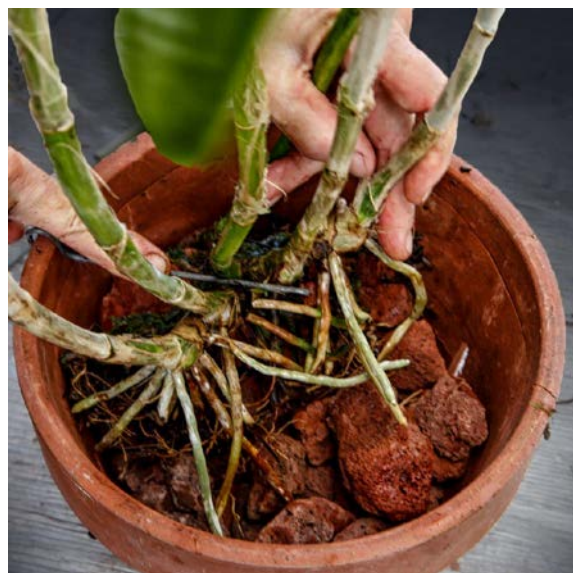


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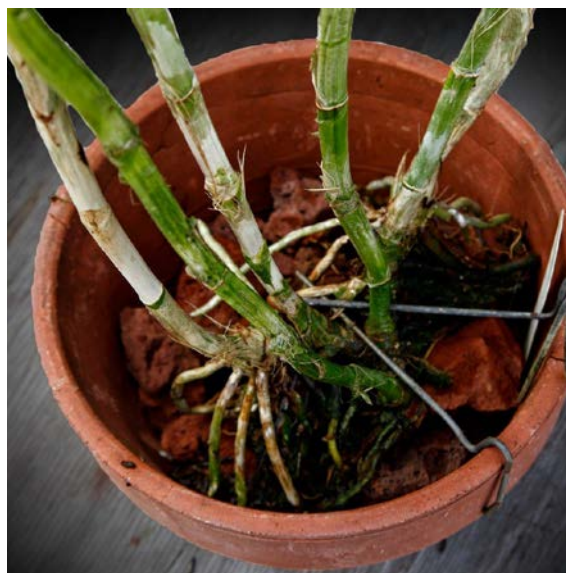
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Secure the plant in place with rhizome clips so it doesn't move in the pot.



A second rhizome clip over the first plus a plant halo help secure the plant.

You can water the plant every second or third day while you're waiting for the new roots to emerge. You can also place some sphagnum moss over the newest pseudobulb from which the next pseudobulb and the new roots will emerge to protect and encourage the new growth. When the new roots finally emerge, you'll add a handful of your potting mix to the pot every week. The roots will grow and branch into your new mix. You will continue to add a handful of mix to the pot each week, and after about 4 or 5 weeks, your plant will be fully established in its new home with fresh mix.

Blc. Pali Polka Dot

(Blc. Chinese Bronze x C. aclandiae)



The potting mix is being backfilled over the growing roots, about 2 weeks into the backfilling process..



The plant is fully established with happily growing roots in fresh mix.



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Blc. RIO's Touch of Class

(C. Penny Kuroda x C. tigrina)



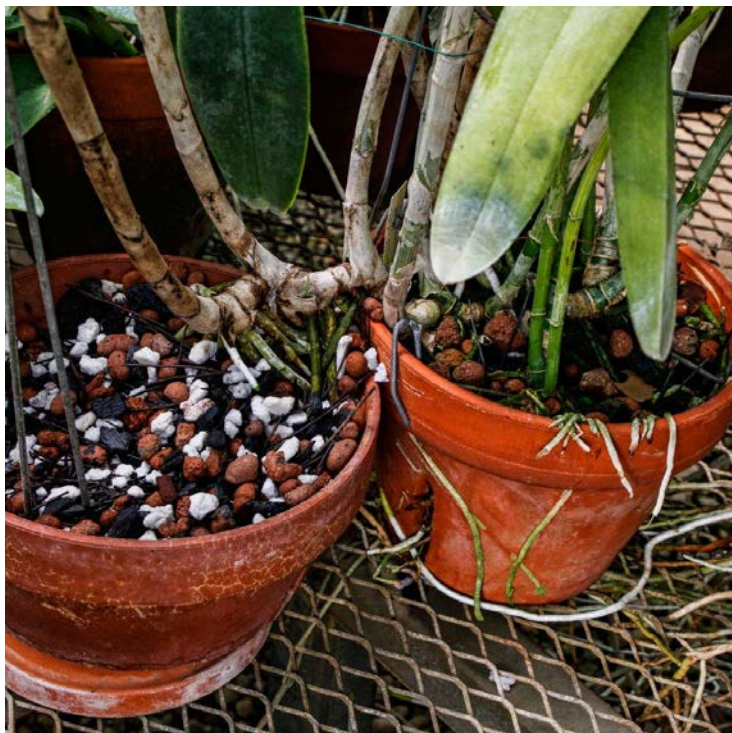
Ruben Sauleda gave me a seedling of this bifoliate cattleya. After its incredible first bloom, I couldn't wait for it to grow up.



In November, there wasn't a live root and I was afraid the plant was a goner. I repotted Keith Davis style and then had to wait.



By May, there were three new growths emerging from behind the protective sphagnum. The plant is on the road to recovery!



Keith's No Stress Division – Position a pot filled with media next to the growing lead and let it grow into the pot.

Keith has a lot of other techniques for repotting your cattleyas, like letting a lead grow over the edge of the pot to grow into a second pot prefilled with potting mix while it is secured to the mother plant. So simple! But if you find yourself between the rock and a hard place with a bifoliate cattleya that simply must get out of a stale mix, try repotting Keith Davis style. It may take 6 months for the plant to start growing new roots so you can backfill the pot and get the plant established. Of course, if you consider the alternative you'll really enjoy that next bloom knowing it otherwise might never have been!