

Growing Clivia from Seed

Most instructions predict about 70% germination for Clivia seed. This is a likely target with traditional methods of sowing.

Using one of the tools I have developed for my orchid seedlings:

- I achieve 95-98% germination.
- I usually see the first few plants bloom in 32-34 months - less than 3 years!

The key to this is keeping plants in accelerated growth till they reach blooming size.

First of all, I deal with seed twice a year:

1. I harvest seed from my own plants in the February to April time frame.
2. I import seed from South Africa. The annual shipment usually arrives in August.

While Clivia can grow in almost anything, incl. decomposed orchid potting mix, you get far better long term growth using a nutrient rich mix. Typically I use:

ProMix	4 pts	5 pts
Garden soil	2 pts	-
Composted Cow Manure	2 pts	2 pts
Sand	1 pt	1 pt

If I do not have plain garden soil on hand, I mix as per the 2nd column. Either way, I use the same mix for sowing seed or potting seedlings/mature plants.

I do not use seed trays, as the seedlings send the initial long roots sideways, making it impossible to fit the plants into proper size pots when transplanting.

Depending upon the number of seeds available, I use either a 3" round pot (1-5 seeds) or a 3.1/3" square pot (6-10 seeds). *To prevent the seedlings from sending roots out through the drain holes, I place a piece of fabric in the bottom of each pot.*

I place these freshly sown seed pots in a 'humidity chamber' (please see separate article on how to con-



struct), where there is about 1½" of water below the shelf for the pots. I crack the lid open at one end only. In this very high humidity environment, I only need to water once every 3-4 weeks (perhaps a little more frequently in summer).



If it is too cold in the greenhouse, the humidity chamber can be placed on an electric seedling heat mat to raise the temperature by about 10°F (5.5°C).

Once the seedlings have 1½ leaves (abt 5 months), I pot up into individual 2½" pots. Photo on the right shows what happens if you do not prevent roots from growing through the drain holes. Those plants required extra deep 4" pots.



The potted up seedlings go back into the humidity chamber until the seedlings have 2-3 leaves. At that point they go out on the greenhouse bench. Front rows are ready to go out, rear rows are recently potted up.



Aug 2024 seed shipment, seedlings on the bench in June 2025 (9 months from date of sowing).



The same bench section in early Feb 2026 (= 17 months from date of sowing).



By this time, the largest seedlings have 6-7 leaves.

At 20-24 months, the majority of the seedlings have outgrown the 2½" pot. They graduate to a Quart pot (4½"), and stay there till blooming size:



- A** = 3⅓" pot with 8-10 seeds
- B** = 2½" individual pot, just potted
- C** = Quart (4½") pot for large seedlings
- D** = Gallon (6½") pot for BS plants.

In addition to the composted cow manure in the mix, we provide additional nutrients:

- NutriCote (110 day) in the spring, 1-2 tsp. in mature plants, and a sprinkling for the seedlings.
- We water with fertilizer (Peters 20:20:20) every 14 days:
 - Seedlings:** 300 PPM March-October
200 PPM November-February
 - BS plants:** 300 PPM April-October

We make certain that the seedlings do not dry out, this way all seedlings are kept in active growth year round. While only a few will bloom in less than 3 years, we will see many in less than 4 years.

Clay Pots vs Plastic Pots

Originally I had some plants in clay and others in plastic. I was not happy with the growth of the plants in clay pots. Plants in clay pot were drying out too fast, and simply did not grow as well as those potted in plastic pots, where we could maintain moisture level better during the growing season.

Then, my tenant and I both bought some seedlings from the same source at the same time. His went into clay pots, and mine went into plastic pots. After a year there was a very significant size difference, so we both use exclusively plastic now.

Lastly, let me share a few interesting plants, which came my way when I rescued the Lenny Zieff collection of mostly unlabeled plants. In a sea of orange flowers, one showed up with a greenish throat (LZ10):



Another, LZ07, has a mostly white throat. It bloomed for the 2nd time in July (I didn't notice it when it bloomed the first time), and for the 3rd time in October.

It is not really a Ghost type. I invite suggestions as to what this type or color form should be called.