



PLEIONE - Epiphyte, (grows on hosts) Lithophyte (grows on rocks etc.)

Pleiones are small bulbs, usually conical in shape, which each year, send up a flower and leaf structure, from the side of the bulb, usually from low down towards the base. This flower spike also has the leaf formation which develops fully after the flower has faded. The new bulb then develops from the base of the leaf structure, which swells and feeds from the old bulb, and finally ends up in a new bulb. Many growers have these little gems for a few years, and then complain that the bulb just shrivelled up and disappeared, and there lies the problem.

To maintain a collection of bulbs which multiply each year and increase the display, pleiones need three things.

1. A good potting medium in which they are well anchored. (bury to 1/3 of bulb).
2. Shaded light, and good air movement.
3. Water and fertiliser.

Most pleiones are lost in the first few weeks or months of their development, mainly due to **overwatering**, or being blown or dislodged from the pot damaging the new root system. However, the damage is not noticed until the grower decides that the new bulb is failing to develop, and the old bulb is shrivelling.

Pleiones in the wild are either attached to mossy covered tree branches or cling to rocks. They send out their **one and only set of roots** as the new leaf is growing. They need very little water during this time and definitely, no fertiliser, as the tender new roots burn easily. If the new root system is given water on a regular basis, they do not need to grow much in search of the water, therefore, the bulb has a small root system which is inadequate to supply the growing bulb, also, there is a much greater risk of being dislodged from the potting mix as they do not have anything to anchor them in the pot. Fine misting is all that is required for the first few weeks until the roots are well developed, then regular watering and fertilising may commence.

In nature, some grow on rocks and the roots develop in search of water, usually following the melting snow. The ones on trees are dependent on moist moss covering the branches, and depend on the next rain for a good watering.

Resist the temptation of checking root systems, if the root tips are damaged, they will not regenerate, and the bulb will not develop. Most growers develop their own mix, but they will grow in straight potting mix or Sphagnum Moss or a combination of

both. The only difficulty in using potting mix, I find, is that it is difficult to get moist again after the initial dry period whilst the roots develop.

Pleiones may be lifted and repotted each year, or left in the old mix and topped up, so that the new roots will be below the mix. When the leaves go yellow and dry off, in Autumn, the bulb is entering the dormant stage and it is time to decrease and finally stop watering altogether, some growers like to keep the mix just moist.

They are well worth trying if you haven't already. The size of the flower produced and the display given, makes these little bulbs great value for money. But please, do not overwater them, if you do it will be your money down the drain.

Pleiones also develop Bulbils or small bulbs from the top of the bulb, these will take some years to develop into flowering size, but will eventually. These Bulbils may be covered with mix but not too far down. I have success by putting them down the side of the pot, they too then send out small leaves and develop a bigger bulb each year.

Good Growing.
Ros