



# THE MILLION ORCHID PROJECT

With the help of students and local community, Fairchild has been generating large quantities of native orchids with the goal to re-establish them within South Florida landscapes.



*Trichocentrum undulatum*, also known as the “Mule Eared Orchid”, is native to extreme southern Florida, it is also found in the West Indies, Mexico, Central America, and northern South America. These orchids grow on the trunks and branches of hardwood trees and mangroves. They have long leathery, folded leaves that can reach over 5 feet in length.

**Where to plant?** These orchids prefer tropical hardwood trees, avoid smooth flaky bark species. Select forks in branches, crotches, or horizontal limbs that have some shade from the afternoon sun. If possible choose branches that have plenty of head space above them since this plant can reach massive sizes. You can also plant directly on the trunks of trees and palm and preferably on the north or east face to avoid direct afternoon sun. If you wish, you may leave the plant outdoors in a pot permanently.

**How to plant?** Attach seedlings individually using cotton string or burlap twine. Do not apply any of the sphagnum moss provided in the tray, doing so will hinder root attachment and cause the roots to stay too wet promoting root rot. Make sure the plants are tightly secured to the branch and any new root leads are in contact with the bark surface; take special care not to injure the new roots.

Other products such as plastic ties and monofilament can be used but these products are slow to deteriorate and are not biodegradable. You can also reinforce attachment using Liquid Nails glue (not provided); apply small drops of glue directly to the bark of the tree, allow glue to harden for 15 to 30 minutes, until it has the consistency of sticky clay. Press the pseudobulb (base of leaves, above roots) into the drop of glue, allowing the roots to hang below the glue and contact the bark. Avoid embedding roots in the glue (see photo).

**When to water?** Native orchids require little to no long term care once they become established on the tree. However watering

is necessary during root attachment phase. For the first month daily watering is required, after roots become attached to tree watering is not necessary. Using hose or misters thoroughly soak the orchid roots and surrounding bark. For best results allow roots to dry for 10-15 minutes and reapply water. Plants that are in a pots will need to be watered when the media becomes completely dried.

**Should I fertilize?** Native orchids require no fertilizer once they become established on a tree. Standard garden fertilizer can be applied monthly to promote growth. We suggest ½ strength (20-20-20) fertilizer or a commercial orchid fertilizer.

To learn more about other ways to participate in The Million Orchid Project, Contact: Dr. Jason Downing; [jdowning@fairchildgarden.org](mailto:jdowning@fairchildgarden.org) or 305.667.1651, ext. 3354.