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Chirita brassicoides 'Marble Leaf'

How I Grow *Chirita brassicoides* 'Marble Leaf'

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I received a little plantlet of this species at the 2005 Convention from Tim Tuttle who had gotten it from a nursery exporter in China. Not knowing anything about its growing requirements, I tried to learn more about it from the internet. All I could glean is that this species is native to SW Guangxi province (Longzhou Xian) in southwestern China and that it grows among rocks on limestone hills. The climate of the whole province was stated to be "dry mild winters and long hot humid summers". I was unable to determine if its leaf patterning was usual for the species or if this was a specific clone.

With this climate and locale information in mind, I potted it in the mix I use for Chiritas: 1/3 each by volume of peat, perlite and vermiculite to which I added extra lime. I have used New Zealand sphagnum moss in this mix but found the lime-loving gesneriads tended to prefer regular peat and extra lime.


After several trials of placement in my growing areas, I found the plant seemed to do best on the edge of a two-tube shelf, in a somewhat cooler area, with a temperature range of 15-21°C (59-70°F) in winter and 18-26°C (64-80°F) in summer. The lights are on timers set for 12 hours on/off.

My plant was fertilized weekly with 1/4 strength of several fertilizers in rotation, including 20-20-20, "Fish", 20-8-20, and DynaGro. As it grew, the plant often needed watering midweek as well. On the whole, I keep it on the dry side as I do my other Chiritas.

Due to its very rigid leaves that tend to grow distortedly, it had to be turned frequently. This growth habit is similar to *Chirita liboensis*. The flower stalks, which first began in about March, occasionally needed help to free themselves from under the foliage. There were 3 flower stalks showing on the plant at the convention with another 6 developing under the leaves. Each stalk produces 8-10 large pale purple/mauve flowers with a lighter throat with 3 brown blotches.

Like other Chiritas, this species can also be propagated from leaves. The propagating mix must be "open" and kept barely moist to prevent the leaf from rotting. The plantlets that develop from leaves have the marbled markings of the parent plant.

In conclusion, I feel that this attractive, compact-growing, floriferous new species is an interesting addition to the range of available Chiritas and hopefully will contribute positively to future hybridizing efforts.



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Chirita brassicoides
'Marble Leaf'
close-ups of flower
and leaf patterning



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