

Orchid Care

Orchids make fabulous houseplants, and add elegance to any room. With a little care and the right conditions, orchids offer months & even years of enjoyment. Many types of orchids are easy to care for & can thrive in a home environment. The key to success is selecting the right orchid for the condition available. By following a few simple steps, your orchids will flourish & bloom.

LIGHT

Each type of orchid prefers slightly different growing conditions, depending on how they grow in the wild. Some orchids, like the cattleya grow in the forest canopy & can tolerate a fair amount of light. Others grow closer to the forest floor & need lower light levels. The amount of light needed can be classified in 3 ways.

1. Orchids needing high light can live in a south window, or a bright east or west facing window.
2. Medium light orchids will survive in an east or west exposure.
3. Orchids requiring low light will live in a bright north window, or a shaded east/west exposure.

Some orchids like the phalaenopsis do not like direct sunlight. A position slightly away from a window may be more suitable.

Signs of sunburn may be limp leaves, yellowing leaves, or brown spots near the tips of the leaves. Signs that your orchid may not be receiving enough light may be; very dark green leaves, sparse or limp foliage. Refer to the specific information on the back of this sheet to find the light requirements for your selected type of orchid.

HUMIDITY

Orchids thrive in a humid environment. You can achieve this in your home by placing plants in groups and/or placing orchids on trays of gravel, partially filled with water. Take care that the pots are not sitting directly in the water.

Misting orchids with water will also improve the humidity around them. Keep in mind that the more misting a plant receives the less watering it will need. Misting should be done in the mornings only, so that the plants are dry by nightfall. This will help prevent any fungal diseases from occurring. (Only mist the leaves, and never the flowers).

FERTILIZING

When it comes to feeding orchids, they fall into two main categories. Monopodial, meaning the plant grows leaves from the top. And sympodial, meaning the orchid produces new growth next to the older one.

For both categories of orchids consider the time-worn adage of feeding "weakly weekly." Orchids are generally considered to be light feeders. So, when they are actively growing, fertilizer should be used at about a 1/4 their recommended strength for 3 successive waterings. The 4th should be a pure water rinse to flush out any soluble salts that have accumulated.

Phalaenopsis fall into the first category (Monopodial) and prefer a balanced fertilizer like **GARDENWORKS™** 20-20-20 while the plant is actively growing. Other orchids such as; cattleyas, dendrobiums, oncidiums, odontoglossums, cymbidiums, miltonias, zygopetalums, and paphiopedilums fall into the sympodial category.

Begin fertilizing in the spring when new growth appears using a fertilizer such as Schultz Orchid Food 19-31-17. By mid-May to June, as the plants begin to really grow, move to a high-nitrogen formula such as Plant Prod 25-10-10. Do not fertilize while in bloom as this will shorten the life of the flowers. In late summer or early fall after blooms have faded, switch back to the low-nitrogen, high-phosphorus, and potassium formula (19-31-17). By October reduce fertilizer applications to once a month or less until spring.

PESTS & DISEASES

Pay attention to light, nutrition, & moisture requirements. Avoid standing water on the roots & leaves, and make sure good air circulation is provided by maintaining space between individual plants. Although orchids are relatively pest free, inspect plants on a regular basis for signs of scale, mealybug, aphids, & spider mites. Treat light infestations with Safer's insecticidal soap according to label directions.

WATERING

The easiest way to water your orchid is to place it into the sink & soak the medium with water. Water the plant well, allow the water to drain from the bottom of the pot. Orchids don't like to sit in excess water as it can cause root rot. Use room temperature water, as hot or cold water may shock them. It is also important not to get any water in the crown of the plant when watering. Tip - Keep a wooden skewer down the side of your orchid pots. Check it periodically to see if your plant needs water. Each type of orchid prefers a different amount of water, and keep in mind that they will require more water in the summer months! Check the list on the left for specific watering care for your selected orchid.

RE-POTTING

Most orchids are epiphytic, they use trees trunks and branches to grow on. These orchids have aerial roots by which the plant takes up nutrients & water, therefore orchids grow best in a bark medium, which is very porous and well draining.

Most orchids will benefit from repotting every 18-24 months. Repot plants into slightly larger pots in the spring or after blooming. Never repot an orchid that is in flower, or that has a new flower spike growing. In many cases this will cause the flowers to drop.

Some orchids come potted in bark mixes, and some in sphagnum moss. Bark mixes contain, fir bark, coarse perlite, charcoal, and often some coarse peat. This type of mix is recommended as it won't dry out as quickly and offers other benefits. There are fine and coarse grades available; check the label to find out which is best for your type of orchid.

To begin repotting, remove all of the old media from around the roots of the plant. Using clean or sterilized scissors, cut off any rotten or broken roots. If a substantial number of roots have been removed, do not increase the pot size. Weak or old stems may be cut or pulled off of the plant at this time. Once the roots have been trimmed, place a handful of fresh bark in the bottom of the pot & spread the remaining roots over the bark. (Pre-soaking the bark in warm water before repotting is recommended). Gently fill in the rest of the pot with the bark, working it through the roots. Make sure that the junction between the roots & leaves is at the top of the medium. Keep your freshly repotted orchid in a shaded, but humid environment. Misting the leaves for the first few weeks will be beneficial until new root growth occurs.

Phalaenopsis The 'Moth orchid': One of the easiest orchids to grow. Requires moderate-low light (keep out of direct sunlight). Allow potting medium to dry slightly between waterings. Ideal temperatures during growing period are day 24°-29°C/ night 15°-21°C

Paphiopedilum The 'Lady Slipper' orchid: Requires low-moderate light (keep out of direct sunlight). Keep potting medium evenly moist. Warm days and cool nights in winter will help encourage flowering. Ideal temperatures during growing period are day 22°-28°C/night 18°C

Cymbidiums: Requires moderate light & cool temperatures (day 24°-29°C). Place plants outside for the summer in semi shade. Temperature is the most critical factor in blooming cymbidiums. If they are too warm, they may not bloom. Leave the plants outside until late October or when temperatures drop to below 4°C. The cooler nights are needed to induce lowering. Bring inside & keep in a bright cool location. Keep moist in the summer, & water less in winter.

Odontoglossum: These orchids feature spectacular blooms in many shades. They prefer low to moderate light (avoid direct sunlight). Odontoglossums need an evenly moist medium, allow to dry slightly between waterings. Cooler temperatures are preferred day 18°-24°C/night 13°-18°C. To help induce flowering, place orchids outside in a semi-shaded area for the summer. Bring inside before any chance of frost.

Zygopetalum: Featuring fragrant flowers in shades of purple & green, with yellow & brown markings. These orchids prefer low to medium light with cooler temperatures (day 18°-24°C/night 16°-20°C). Keep medium evenly moist, allowing it to dry slightly between waterings. To initiate flowers place the plant outside in a shaded location & bring indoors before any chance of frost.

Dendrobiums: Beautiful orchids with long lasting flowers. They like a high light location & warm temperatures (18°-24°C). Allow pots to dry between watering. They like to be pot bound, so only repot when necessary.

Cattleya: The 'Corsage Orchid': These orchids are forgiving plants to grow & can survive with a little neglect. They like high light & warm temperatures (day 18°-24°C/night 13°C). These orchids can tolerate drying out between waterings.

Oncidium & Miltonia: Both of these types of orchids are very easy to grow & have unique blooms. They prefer moderate indirect sunlight & warm temperatures (day 21°-27°C/night 16°C). A variation in night & day temperatures is needed for them to bloom. Keep plants evenly moist to keep leaves from shriveling.



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