



## Orchids

Orchids have a reputation for being mysterious and exotic, therefore being high maintenance and hard to grow. Exotic? Yes. Hard to grow? No. In fact, orchids are very hardy, long-lived and will bloom for weeks at a time.

Orchids are the largest family of flowering plants in nature with over 25,000 identified species and new species being discovered every year. There are over 100,000 registered hybrids. Every country in the world and every state in the United States, including Alaska, has native orchids. What does this mean? That there is an orchid out there for your home.



Orchids have thick fleshy roots with fine fibrous roots attached to them, which allow the plant to take in nutrients. Some varieties will also have aerial roots. In a natural setting, these aerial roots allow the orchid to cling to their supports. Many orchids also have thick stems, called pseudobulbs, which are storage organs for food and water. The flowers have six symmetrically-arranged petal-like segments and come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colors. Orchids may produce a single flower or clusters of flowers.

With so many options, how do you start?

There is an expression, “You can’t fail with a phal.” The American Orchid Society recommends phalaenopsis orchids, also known as moth orchids, as the best-suited orchid for growing in the home.

Phalaenopsis orchids have long lasting sprays of lovely blooms in colors ranging from white, yellow, lavender, fuchsia, yellow with red veins and white with a magenta throat. Their main flowering season is late winter to early spring. They have smooth, shiny, large leaves, emanating from the central crown, and they lack pseudobulbs.

Provide bright light, but no direct sun. An east, west or shaded south window is best. If the leaves turn dark green and become limp, there is too little light. Phals like a temperature difference from night to day. Daytime temperatures should range from 75 to 85 F, with cooler nights ranging from 60 to 65 F. Provide extra humidity by sitting the orchid's pot on a tray of moistened pebbles.

The phalaenopsis likes to be consistently moist. Do not allow it to dry out completely. Because orchids are grown in a variety of media ranging from bark to soil to moss, the best way to judge if your orchid needs to be watered is "the pencil test." Simply, poke a sharpened pencil gently into the potting medium and pull it out. If the tip is darkened with moisture, the orchid does not need to be watered at this time. However, if the pencil tip is dry, it is time to water. Always water your orchid thoroughly so the water runs out of the bottom of the pot.

Fertilizer must be provided on a regular basis because most potting media have little nutrition. A good general rule is to use a balanced fertilizer with a 1-1-1 ratio and mix it at a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the recommended rate of dilution. Just remember to fertilize "weakly, weekly" and your orchid will flourish.



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