

Orchid Care

Orchids come in many sizes, shapes and colors. Some are difficult to grow, while others can easily flourish on a window sill.

Humidity:

Most orchids prefer HUMIDITY levels between 40% and 60%. The average house has about 10% humidity, thus some adjustments will have to be made. Humidity can be raised by misting leaves every morning, by running a small humidifier or by setting them in pebble trays. A pebble tray is a container with 5" or higher sides, larger than the pot, containing 1 1/2" or more of gravel and containing 1/4" to 1" water. The bottom of the pot rests on the rocks, but never comes in contact with the water. Along with humidity goes good air circulation. Lacking an airy room, a small fan or slightly opened window will help.

Watering:

Orchids, though not all, will prefer a little drying out between waterings. Just how dry depends on the variety. Generally, orchids with thick fleshy stems and leaves need less water than orchids with thin, more delicate foliage. Always water your orchid plants in the morning to allow foliage to dry before night.

Fertilize:

Orchids are not heavy feeders. The best advice for most orchids is to fertilize half the recommended strength fertilizer twice monthly. The formulation of plant food you use will depend both on the type of orchid and the type of growing medium it is potted in. Usually, orchids may be fed during periods of active growth with 20-20-20, or, if planted in mixtures containing fir bark, 20-20-20 alternated with 30-10-10.

Light:

A general rule of thumb for determining correct light levels is to judge by the color of the leaves. Reddish or purplish edges to the leaves are an indication that the leaves are getting as much light as they can take

without burning. Too much light can also bleach out the chlorophyll, causing the leaves to look pale or yellowish-green. Too low light makes foliage dark, grass green and the plant will not flower well or at all. A healthy orchid in proper light has foliage that is clear light to medium green with no new leaves showing a soft sheen.

Insects:

Mealy bugs, scales and aphids can simply be washed off (preferable outdoors). If chemical pesticides are used, Fertilome's Triple Action will control scale, mealy bug and aphids. Rubbing alcohol may be sprayed on plants. Blooms and buds as an alternative to an insecticide.

Potting:

Most orchids will need to be repotted at one time or another either when they out grow their existing container or when the potting medium begins to break down, generally every 2 to 3 years. Because orchids like impeccable drainage, media such as fir bark, Os-munda fiber, volcanic rock and other charcoal have all been used. Exactly what mixture should be used and when to repot will depend on the orchid variety, your climate and the size and age of the plant.

Reblooming:

For 2 to 3 weeks in the Fall and Spring, when the outside night temperature is between 50^o and 60^o F, phalaenopsis plants should be outside in the shade in a covered area such as a screened in porch or covered deck or patio, so that night temperatures are 15^o to 25^o cooler than day temperatures. All orchids will benefit from a day-night temperature differential of 10^o or more. Cymbidiums should drop to near freezing night temperatures in the Fall to encourage Spring blooming.