



Orchids

Orchids are a perfect pick-me-up for mid-winter blues. Why not give yourself a valentine? With some loving care you can keep it blooming until spring, flourishing through the summer and ready to bloom again come next season. With the purchase of your first orchid, you will dip your toes into a wide river of orchid lore which at first seems overwhelming. No need to fear: following a few simple guidelines you can learn to take care of your orchid and, little by little, absorb some of that information as it becomes pertinent. General care information listed below is supplemented on the next page by more specific notes for a list of commonly available orchid genera.

light

Orchids thrive and flower best in bright light. Place your orchid fairly close to the light of a north or east window or a somewhat shaded west or south window. A sheer curtain will also diffuse the intensity of the strong, direct sunlight coming in from the west or south. Remember that sunlight is less intense in winter so orchids will thrive in direct sun in winter. A light meter may be used to measure the amount of light available – specifications listed on the next page for each genera are in foot candles for Low (500-1500), Medium (1500-3000) and High (3000-4000). Even without a meter, however, you can use these general divisions to decide which orchid will work best in your space.

temperature and humidity

- Generally speaking, orchids are comfortable where you are comfortable. In order to flower well, however, they prefer to have temperatures 10° lower at night than during the day. Temperatures for different orchids are listed as Cool (minimum night 50°/maximum day 80°), Intermediate (55°/85°) and Warm (60°/90°).
- All orchids prefer a higher humidity (40-70%) than found in most homes. Group plants together and use gravel-filled humidity trays to provide a localized humid environment. A room or furnace humidifier will also be helpful.

watering

- Most orchids are epiphytes that have adapted to their environment by developing thickened roots with spongy tissue which can take up water quickly in order to survive dry periods. Orchids with thick, fleshy leaves and those that have evolved pseudobulbs (swollen stems that store water) should be watered when the orchid medium has nearly dried out. Orchids with thinner, softer leaves and terrestrial orchids that have a more conventional root system will need an evenly moist orchid medium – never soggy, but never dry.
- This means, generally speaking, you will be watering once every 4 – 7 days depending on your plant, the dryness of your home and seasonal differences in light and temperature. Learn the weight of your orchid in its pot, both saturated and dry, and you will soon be able to gauge its needs. Remember that plants that are actively growing (usually during the spring and summer months) and those in flower may require water more frequently.
- It is best water in the morning, using tepid water that has been allowed to sit out. Take your plant to the sink and gently apply sufficient water so that it flows freely through the orchid medium. Allow the container to drain completely so the plant won't be sitting in its own water when you return it to its cachepot or saucer.

fertilizing

- “Feed weakly, weekly” – dilute your fertilizer at ¼ to ½ the recommended strength and fertilize your orchid once a week during the period of active growth, once a month during the cooler weather and lower light of winter.
- When your orchid has finished blooming it will need time to regain the energy spent in flowering. This period lasts from 4 – 8 months depending on genus and growing conditions. Use a fertilizer with ample nitrogen (such as Jack’s Orchid 7-5-6) to support this period of leaf and root growth.
- Switch to a fertilizer with higher phosphate (Jack’s Orchid Bloom Booster 3-9-6) when your orchid begins to ‘spike’ – it is getting ready to bloom again!

general notes: re-potting

- Most orchids will need to be re-potted every two to three years, though *Paphiopedilums* needs to be potted every year. Re-potting becomes necessary when the orchid medium begins to break down, losing its porous texture.
- Wait until your orchid has finished blooming – usually this will be in the spring. Cut off the flower stem at its very base with a clean, very sharp knife. Check for signs of new growth, when succulent green root tips begin to emerge on plump white roots from the base of the plant – your orchid is about to start the cycle of green growth!
- With *Phalaenopsis* and *Vanda* (monopodial) orchids you will just refresh the pot with new orchid medium after trimming out the soft dead roots. Gently wash off all old orchid medium. Cut off any roots that are not fresh, plump and pale greenish white. Fill the pot partway with a small mound of moistened new orchid medium. Spread the roots over this mound and then tuck more moistened orchid medium all around the roots to support the plant.
- All the other common orchids are sympodial – they grow up from a horizontal rhizome. If this type of orchid has outgrown its pot, it can either be divided or moved to a slightly larger pot. Plant these orchids to one extreme side as the horizontal stem will grow in one direction. If dividing, keep divisions in clumps of 3-5 upright pseudobulbs.
- Keep freshly repotted plants in a shady, humid area until continued new root growth is observed.

commonly available orchid genera

Genus	Common Name	Type	Light	Temperature	Water...
Cattleya	Queen of Orchids or Corsage Orchid	Sympodial Epiphyte	Medium	Intermediate	...then allow to dry out thoroughly
Dendrobium	The Spray Orchid	Sympodial Epiphyte	Medium	Intermediate	...then allow to dry out/keep moist during active growth
Ludisia	Jewel Orchid	Sympodial Terrestrial	Low	Warm	...to keep moist always
Odontoglossum	Toothed Lip Orchid	Sympodial Epiphyte	Medium	Cool	...when nearly dry
Oncidium	Dancing Lady Orchid	Sympodial Epiphyte	Med/High	Cool	...when nearly dry
Paphiopedelum	Lady’s Slipper Orchid	Sympodial Semi-Terrestrial	Low	Green leaves: Cool Mottled leaves: Intermediate	...to keep moist always
Phalaenopsis	Moth Orchid	Monopodial Epiphyte	Low	Warm	...when nearly dry

A quote from David Bird, the Orchid Man: “Remember: until you kill 100 orchids you cannot call yourself an expert.”