

Growing Orchids in Your Home

You can grow orchids in your home without living in the tropics or having the luxury of a greenhouse. Today, houseplants are a regular part of home decoration. If you have ever successfully grown a houseplant, or enjoyed a flowering potted plant, you can grow orchids. The good news is there are plenty of options to give a beautiful display of flowering orchids year round.

LIGHT Without enough light, orchids may produce lush looking growths but no flowers. Not giving orchids enough light is the most common reason for failure to bloom. Orchids grown under sufficient light will have lighter, somewhat yellow-green foliage and strong upright growths. Place the orchid close to an east, west, or lightly shaded south window. A north window will rarely provide adequate light. If light is too intense in a southern exposure, a sheer curtain can hung to diffuse the light.

TEMPERATURE Orchids will be comfortable where you are comfortable. Typical home temperatures of 55–60 F (13–16 C) at night and 75 F (24 C) during the day are fine. Guard against excessively low or high temperatures immediately adjacent to glass windows. Some leeway for seasonal fluctuations is allowed. Do not place your plants in front of the furnace or air conditioning ducts.

HUMIDITY Group plants to take advantage of their collective transpiration (exhaled moisture) or place them on gravel-filled trays to raise the humidity. Be sure that the plants are sitting above the water level.

WATERING More orchids are killed by over-watering than by any other reason. Constant wetness will cause the roots to rot, which leaves the plant without a means for taking up nourishment which then causes the leaves to droop and will eventually kill the plant. The classic advice is to water the day before the plant dries out. If you have to let the plant go dry to figure out what a dry plant weighs, it will not kill the plant and will make you a better grower. Another measure is to use the pencil trick (the point of a sharpened pencil, when inserted into the medium, will darken with moisture if the plant has enough

water). And, there's always the old standby - put your finger in the mix. If it feels wet, it is wet. If you aren't sure whether it is time to water, wait one more day.

When orchids are watered, they should be watered copiously. Water should be provided until it runs freely from the drainage holes. The best place to water your plant is in the kitchen sink. Use lukewarm water (do not use salt softened water) and water your plant for about 15 seconds and be sure to thoroughly wet the media. Then allow the plant to drain for about 15 minutes. It may appear dry but it has had enough water. After the plants are watered, they should be placed so that the pots do not stand in water.

FERTILIZER Orchids need to be fed regularly. Growers suggest using a "balanced" fertilizer such as 20-20-20. If you are unsure of what fertilizer to use, you can generally use any fertilizer you would for your other container plants. Orchids will do far better with too little fertilizer than with too much. Feed "weakly, weekly" applying a dilute (1/4 strength) fertilizer each time you water. Water first then follow with fertilizer solution.

TIP FOR SUCCESS Orchids grown in the home during the colder months can be moved outdoors in a protected area during the summer. Take care to protect them from direct sun and position them where they will be easy to water and care for. Before returning them indoors in early autumn, inspect plants to make sure they are free of insects and ailments.

PLANTS Some of the more popular orchids to consider are:

Cattleya Alliance Hybrids and Species: Choose miniature types less than 10 inches tall; bright light of southern exposure is best.

Dendrobium: Dwarf phalaenopsis types, or higher-altitude miniatures; bright light at south window required. *Oncidium:* Many types available in flower, best if smaller growing; bright light.

Paphiopedilum: Lady's-slipper orchids grow well under home conditions, giving long-lasting blooms; provide African violet growing conditions.

Phalaenopsis: Moth orchids are absolutely the number-one best orchid houseplant; provide African- violet conditions.

ORCHIDS IN THE GARDEN Properly selected and cared for, orchids can be among the showiest and most exotic of all garden or patio plants and almost without exception, no matter where you live there are orchids that can be adapted to outdoor culture for at least part of, if not the entire, year.

There are many areas throughout the southern and central United States where temperatures for a good portion of the year are compatible with the needs of many orchids. Even if you live in areas with severe winters, you will find that orchids thrive out-of-doors during the warm summer months. This enables the plants to grow so much better than they would if left indoors all year.

Some coastal areas are nearly frost-free year round. In these areas, with some protection from excessive sun, wind, and rain, lovely orchid plants can be successfully cultivated on the patio or as a part of the landscape.

Growers in frost-free areas with cooler summer nights (below 60 F in August and into the fall) can grow cymbidiums, one of the finest of all garden orchids.

Where summer nights are warmer, many varieties of vandas and cattleya types are appropriate.

Culture sheets for more than a dozen genera and groups of orchids that explain the basic needs required to grow and flower these plants successfully are available on the AOS web site. You will also find many additional articles and a video library all to help you grow your orchids.

The American Orchid Society is the world's leading provider of information about and related to orchids. We invite you to join us and learn about the world's most fascinating flowers and plants.

American Orchid Society
at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden
10901 Old Cutler Road,
Coral Gables, FL 33156
www.aos.org