

# Orchids

In the world of flowers, orchids are the undisputed champions. Once they were only enjoyed by the wealthy, today orchids are within reach of all. One of the oldest and best organized of plant hobbies; orchid culture now enjoys worldwide popularity. Their incredible beauty and diversity captivate men and women of every walk of life. The idea that orchids are rare and confined to the tropics is far from true. In fact the family to which they belong, *Orchidaceae*, is one of the largest of all flowering plants and representatives can be found all around the world, from the Arctic to almost the Antarctic and from sea level to mountainous regions thousands of meters high. Cattleya Orchids: In nature there are about 50 species of Cattleya native to Central America, growing from the Amazon region to the south of Brazil. The plants produce strong 'pseudobulbs' topped with one or more leathery leaves. Each year a dormant bud at the base grows into a new shoot. This thickens to produce the current year's pseudobulb. The flowers arise from the tip of the current year's growth and come in a wide range of colour combinations from white and pink to green and purple. Some may flower twice a year.

## Light

Place your plant in a bright window and give it lots of direct sunlight during the winter months. During the summer when the sun is at tropical intensity, filtered light will prevent the burning of the leaves.

## Temperature and Humidity

Minimum night temperatures of 10 -15°C (50-60°F), but growth in summer is rapid at temperatures up to 26°C (78°F). Humidity should be moderate at 50%\*

## Watering and Fertilizing

From March to September the potting medium should never be allowed to dry out completely. Water twice weekly and fertilize twice monthly with a recommended orchid fertilizer. From October to February, no fertilizer is needed, but water the plants when the potting medium appears dried out. It is better to underwater as the plants can stand neglect more than over watering!

## Potting

A medium bark mix will do well with added perlite to keep it open. Chopped sphagnum helps retain humidity and some charcoal keeps it 'sweet'. New potting medium will keep the plant growing for two to three years before it turns acid or the plant needs repotting. Only repot when the plants are crawling over the sides of the current pot or ultimately when the new roots are just beginning to appear at the new shoot's base.

## Cymbidium Orchids (pronounced sim-bid-ee-um)

Cymbidiums are ranked as one of the best known and widely popular of all orchids. The genus consists of 50 naturally occurring species and from these thousands of hybrids have been bred. They may be terrestrial in habit (growing on the ground/in soil) or epiphytic (growing on trees) or even lithophytic (growing on rocks). The Cymbidium is

the oldest cultivated orchid, and there is evidence that they were grown in China 2500 years ago. They are one of the easiest orchids to cultivate and it will flower year after year, providing you follow these simple care instructions.

### **Light**

Cymbidiums need as much light as possible without injuring the leaves. Especially during the spring and summer months prior to flowering. If you are growing them outside in summer, early morning sun is ideal, but do provide some shade against the strong noonday sunlight.

### **Temperature and Humidity**

The daytime temperature should be kept below 32°C. During autumn, winter, and spring, night temperatures should not exceed 12°C or 55°F since this is critical for flowering. Humidity should be moderate to high between 50% and 75%.\*

### **Watering and Fertilizing**

Never allow the plants to dry out and always keep the potting medium moist. Normally, watering once a week is sufficient but during the hot summer months it may be necessary to water twice weekly. Use an orchid fertilizer at the recommended rate throughout spring and summer. Reduce the fertilizer strength to half through autumn and winter.

### **Potting and Dividing**

The best time to repot and divide Cymbidiums is between the end of February and the end of June (after flowering). The plants always grow better if they are pot bound. Never over pot. Only repot into plant pots where there is just enough room for the following year's growth. Generally this means going up one pot size.

### **Dendrobium (pronounced den-dro-bee-um)**

There are over a thousand known species of Dendrobium more are still being discovered in the highlands of New Guinea.

### **Light**

Lots of light in winter and during the summer a little shade is required to prevent the leaves from burning.

### **Temperature and Humidity**

In the daytime the temperature should be warm 21°C (70° F) and during the night 10-15°C (50-60°F). Humidity should be moderate at 50-70% \*

### **Watering and Fertilizing**

Never allow the plants to dry out. Keep moist during the growing season and reduce slightly as they come into flower. Dendrobiums are heavy feeders particularly when grown in good light. A dilute solution of a balanced fertilizer twice a month is recommended or once a month in situations of less light.

**Paphiopedilum:(pronounced paf-ee-oh-ped-i-lum)**

Paphiopedilum is named after paphinia the Greek goddess, who the Romans renamed Venus and pedilum (foot or slipper). There are about 60 species from Asia, India and New Guinea. They have a fascinating array of colours and forms and their ease of culture has attracted lifelong admirers. The plants are mostly terrestrials, although some, like Paphiopedilum lowii may be found growing epiphytically, (on trees) or lithophytically, (on rocks) the major blooming season is from mid-autumn onwards, some variations occur.

**Light**

These are low light intensity orchids and direct sun should be avoided. Place your plant in a moderately bright window (north or east facing)

**Temperature and Humidity**

Green-leaved types ideally require a minimum night temperature of approximately 12°C (55°F) while the mottled leaved types do better with a night temperature of 21-26°C (60-65°F). Day temperatures should range between 20-25°C (70-80°F) although short periods of higher temperatures will not injure the plant. The humidity should be moderate, between 50-60% during the day. \*

**Watering and Fertilizing**

Keep moist all the time during the growing season and reduce the amount of water as they come into flower. When grown in good light feed every two weeks with a dilute solution of balanced fertilizer. When grown in lower light conditions fertilize once monthly.

**Phalaenopsis: (pronounced fal-ee-nop-sis)**

These orchids are the easiest and most rewarding for the home grower. The strength of the plant is in its large, leathery leaves and thick roots. New leaves appear slowly and regularly over each other and are generally a deep green but occasionally can be attractively mottled. The flowers appear on a spike from the stem between the leaves and, depending on the type, there may be anything from a single flower to over a hundred. Flowers of the Phalaenopsis Orchid have superb longevity. You can often urge a second flowering from each spike with a timely pruning. When the last flower of the spike fades, you should examine the spike, looking for small fleshy bumps or nodes. From the base of the spike count out 3 nodes (count only the green fleshy nodes - ignore any that are dried out). Cut the spike one inch above the third node. If your plant is healthy and the season is not too late, this process will wake up one or two of the nodes and in a few short weeks it may produce a new spray of fresh blooms. By trying this you could enjoy flowers for nearly 6 months of the year on the same plant.

**Light**

Phalaenopsis orchids grow well in a bright window but avoid direct sun. An east window is ideal, or a shaded south or west window will work.

### **Temperature and Humidity**

Between 18°C (65°F) and 27°C is ideal during the day. At night the temperature should drop to 15°C (60°F). Humidity should be kept fairly high at 60-70%. \*

### **Watering and Fertilizing**

Water the plant thoroughly when it is dry. Let the potting medium dry out between waterings. Never let the plant sit in water or allow water to sit on the plant. Fertilize phalaenopsis with an orchid fertilizer at the recommended strength.

### **Potting**

Clay pots are better for the beginner as they breathe. Use a coarse bark mixture. Unlike most orchids grown in the home, Phalaenopsis plants produce new leaves at the top, rather than producing new growth from the base. As a result they rarely outgrow their pot. The roots often grow outside the pot, but this is quite natural and indicates that you are doing things right.

\*To increase humidity place the plant on a saucer of pebbles with water, keeping the water below the surface of the pebbles. As the water evaporates it will increase the humidity around your orchid. Replenish water as needed. Ensure that the pot does not sit in water; this will cause the roots to rot.