

HOUSEPLANTS DEPARTMENT



GROWING ORCHIDS

By Dee Beckman



GROWING ORCHIDS IN COLORADO

Special thanks to Stan Gordon of Fantasy Orchids

Growing Orchids can be very easy as long as you have plenty of patience and you don't over water (letting the plant sit in water for long periods of time can cause root rot). Our sunny climate can guarantee blooms in one year. We suffer from very low humidity and increasing the humidity level will help you to grow healthy plants.

A lot of Orchids will bloom during the winter months, which is particularly gratifying. With some practice you can have blooms practically year round.

LIGHT

A south or east window is best for most types of orchids. More than 4 hours of direct sunlight on the leaves should be avoided in most cases. Fluorescent lights work very well with leaves 6 -12 inches from the tubes, 12 to 14-hour days. In a greenhouse light levels need to be reduced to about 50%. The leaves of most orchids should be a medium green color. Leaves that are yellow/red may indicate excessive light. Leaves that are a very dark green, thin and brittle are not receiving enough light.

Light is not as important during the flowering season as it is prior to flowering. Place the plant in bright but indirect light. You do not want the plant to suffer from lack of light but too much light may shorten the flower life. A little direct light is fine as long as the plant stays cool and humid.

Many Orchids will only produce their fragrance if the light levels are fairly high. Place the plant in as bright a light as possible to get the most fragrance from your flowers. This will of course shorten the bloom period. Enjoy.

TEMPERATURE

Orchids do rather well in your home because temperatures are usually the same as their native environment. They usually like it between 50 to 80 degrees. If the temperatures are high, you should increase your air circulation to help cool the leaves. There are a few types that will not initiate flower buds unless nighttime temperatures are allowed to fall to 50 degrees or below.

The most important factor in determining how long your flowers will last is night temperature. Keep your temperatures between 50 and 70 degrees F. Also try to avoid any rapid temperature changes as this can cause the flower buds to abort. Make sure the plant is not kept near a heat source such as a heater vent. Hot dry air will cause the flowers to fade fast.

Most flowers will last much longer if they are cared for properly. As an example many Phalaenopsis flowers will last only about a month, if the plant is left in the warmth of a hot greenhouse. If the same plant is taken to a cool location many Phalaenopsis flowers will last as long as six to nine months. Try the following to keep the flowers lasting as long as possible. Keep cool, about 50 to 60-degree night temperature. Try to avoid rapid temperature changes. Keep away from heat vents. Don't place the plant too close to an outside door with a draft.

WATERING

Orchid plants are planted in a very porous soil media, usually bark or volcanic rock. A thorough wetting of the roots is crucial. Water plants generously but never allow the plants to stand in water. Most orchids should become almost dry before watering again. This may require several days to a week depending upon conditions. An easy way to determine when a plant requires water is by its weight. If the plant feels light it may be time to water or put your finger into the soil about 1/3rd of the way, if the soil feels cold or damp don't water.

Blooming orchids require extra watering during bud formation and during flowering. Don't keep the plant wet all the time but water a day earlier than you would normally water. Never let the plant dry out completely when it is in bud or flower formation, this can cause bud blast. Blasting is buds that drop off the plant before they have opened. Try to avoid getting water on the flowers as this can cause ugly black spots to appear.

HUMIDITY

A suggested level is 40% to 60%, higher is even better. Grouping the plants together is one of the easiest ways to increase humidity levels around your plants. Pebble or Rock trays help also (a container with gravel and water in it, don't let the plant sit in the water but on top of the gravel). Humidifiers work the best, especially in the winter. Extra watering **will not** help.

If humidity levels are too low during bud formation the buds may blast or not open properly and if the humidity is too high your flowers may develop black spot. A little air movement will help to stop this problem.

FERTILIZER

Be cautious about fertilizing plants in flower. If fertilizer solution is splashed on the flowers it can cause burn marks or stains. It can also cause premature bud drop or blasting if the plant isn't in an active growth state (new leaf growth). Orchids are not heavy feeders and their roots burn easily. Use a weak solution, half strength or less of bloom fertilizer (15-30-15) occasionally during flowering, only if you see new growth (leaves). If the plant isn't in bloom or bud try a (30-10-10 or a 20-20-20) half strength or weaker foliar feed (Spray on the leaves).

Follow these steps and enjoy your orchid flowers for many months.