

GUIDE TO ORCHID CARE AND REPOTTING

Selection of Plants:

Phalaenopsis orchids are the easiest to grow at home. Nice plants are available at Trader Joe's for \$12 (large and small). Meyer's also has nice plants for about \$20 and up. When possible select plants potted in plastic (which may come in or be placed in a second outer pot for display). Check that the leaves are rigid (not soft or floppy/pliable). It is OK for plant to appear "root-bound" if the roots appear firm and healthy.

Maintenance:

In the winter plants should be in a south-facing window which gets plenty of light as long as the room is not too hot. In the summer, plants may do better outside in partial sun (a mainly shaded place hanging from or under a tree with the inner plastic pot placed in a terra cotta pot for drainage). Be sure to check an outdoor orchid frequently.

Orchids need to be watered about every 4-5 days (maybe more often if heater is on inside). For indoor plants, remove the inner pot and let water run through the plant and let it drain well. Place the inner pot in the outer decorative one (if available) such that the inner pot is elevated from the bottom. If a little more water drains, it should not touch the inner pot but add some humidity. Watering your plants outside is about the same depending on rain and temperature. When it is very hot outside, water more often.

The roots should not be kept wet or they will rot. NEVER WATER WITH 3 ICE CUBES AS HAS BEEN PUBLICIZED – these are tropical plants that like sufficient water but they also are epiphytes with roots that need air. They need to drain well and begin to dry between waterings. Over-watered plants will first develop mushy roots which will lead to shriveled leaves. In under-watered plants, the roots will shrivel or look "papery". Potting medium may start to break down with time and the plant may need to be re-potted. Repotting is recommended every 1 – 2 years for *Phalaenopsis*.

An excellent organic fertilizer is "fish emulsion" (ground up fish) available at G & M and many other stores selling plant fertilizers. A small amount (2-3 tablespoons) of this in about a quart of water in a watering can should be applied to plants about once a month or every other week. This fertilizer is wonderful for all houseplants. Other fertilizer types are also available. All should be used at a dilute strength, 1:4 ratio, "weakly, weekly" so your plant received a low-dosage of fertilizer with every watering.

Re-potting:

It is time to re-pot when the medium seems soggy and doesn't dry out well between waterings, or if the roots seem shriveled, or when all new roots seem to be growing outside the pot. Always use fresh potting medium when re-potting. Medium for re-potting is available at many suppliers of plant materials and consists of pieces of bark. Supplies for re-potting materials (plastic pots, butterfly clips, labels, medium, etc.) can be ordered from www.repotme.com.

To re-pot, remove the plant from the container and discard the old medium. Clip off dead roots. Place the plant in an appropriate-sized container and carefully pack orchid medium around the roots. Compress the roots towards the middle and stuff medium around sides for stability. A clip placed over the center of the roots and attached to the edge may stabilize the plant. **NEVER USE SOIL SINCE MOST ORCHIDS ARE EPIPHYTES.** If most of the roots have been lost, plastic wrap or damp sphagnum moss may be wrapped around the base of the plant for a short time to keep it moist for root development.

Your orchids should bloom for several months (use wooden stakes and butterfly clips for stability) but if your plant is healthy, never cut off the bloom stalk after blooming (unless it becomes brown and dried) as more flowers will develop from the same stalk several times. Remove old stems when brown.