

# ORCHID CARE

## **Q: How often should I water my orchid?**

A: Many people make the mistake of assuming that since orchids are native to tropical rainforests, they must be watered several times a week. Unfortunately, watering this frequently will kill the roots of any orchid in short order. The general rule of thumb for orchids grown in the home is to water every 5 to 12 days, depending on the type of orchid, the temperature the plant is grown in, and the time of year. During the warm summer months when days are long, more frequent watering is required than in the cooler, shorter days of winter.

There are three basic types of orchids, as far as watering is concerned: those that should be kept evenly moist at all times; those that should be allowed to nearly dry out between waterings, except when in active growth; and those that should always be allowed to dry out a bit between waterings. The guidelines below list the major varieties of orchid in each type.

## **Varieties to keep evenly moist (not soggy or wet) at all times:**

Paphiopedilum, Miltonia, Cymbidium, Odontoglossum,

## **Varieties to keep evenly moist during active growth, allowed to dry out between waterings when not:**

Cattleya, Oncidium, Brassia, Dendrobium.

## **Varieties to keep nearly dry between waterings:**

Phalaenopsis, Vanda, Ascocenda.

In a family of plants as large as Orchidaceae, there are, of course, exceptions to these rules. Always be sure to ask for watering instructions when you purchase a variety of orchid with which you are unfamiliar.

## **Q: How often should I be fertilizing my orchids?**

A: Be sure to use an orchid food that is formulated for orchids and follow the instructions on the label. In general, most orchid fertilizers recommend usage once a month. Less frequent fertilizing may stunt growth and inhibit flowering; more frequent fertilizing may burn the roots and leaves and inhibit flowering. For complete step-by-step instructions on how to feed your orchids, [click here](#). Be sure to use an orchid food that is formulated for orchids and follow the label instructions. In general, most orchid fertilizers recommend use once a month. Less frequent fertilizing may stunt growth and inhibit flowering, more frequent fertilizing may burn the roots and leaves and inhibit flowering. For complete step-by-step instructions on how to feed your orchids, [click here](#).

## **Q: What do I do when my phalaenopsis stops blooming?**

A: If your plant has healthy, with thick, green leaves that have not become wrinkled or drooping, cut the old flower stem up high, just above a "node" and just below the lowest bloom. The plant will frequently send out a new flowering branch at that location. If your plant has thin, wilted leaves, or if the plant is small, with only 3-to-4-inch-long leaves, it is best to cut the flower stem all the way down, so that the plant does not weaken itself by blooming again right away. Carefully water and fertilize your plant to build it back into shape for future flowering on a brand-new stem. This can take up to a year or more, as Phalaenopsis, like most orchids, is a relatively slow-growing plant.

## **Q: I am growing my phalaenopsis orchid in the house but they never bloom. What can I do?**

A: The most common reason for any orchid not to bloom is insufficient light. Move your phalaenopsis plants to a window where they will receive strong, but indirect light (near a south-facing window is ideal). You might also try lighting your plants with a fluorescent light fixture placed about 1-2 feet above the foliage. Give up to 12 hours of supplemental light per day. Phalaenopsis will also develop flower spikes in response to a cool period of about four weeks with night temperatures of 55F. After the cool treatment, raise the night temperature back to the normal 60-65F minimum. See if these changes to your growing conditions help to stimulate your plants to bloom.

## **Q: How do I know if my orchid is getting the proper amount of light?**

A: One good indicator is leaf color. Generally speaking, the leaves should be bright green rather than dark green. Dark green indicates too little light while reddish green indicated too much light. Those orchids requiring higher light intensities, such as cattleyas, dendrobiums and oncidiums, should be placed in a south or west facing window, but be sure to protect the leaves from the hot mid-day sun with sheer curtains or move the plants back from the window on hot summer days. Miltonias, phalaenopsis and paphiopedilums prefer lower light intensities and should be located further away from the window or placed in a window facing east or north.

## **Q: The orchid in my window suddenly developed black blotches on the leaves. Is it sick**

A: It sounds like your plant has a bad case of sunburn! Longer, brighter days can increase the light intensity in your window so that the leaves get too hot and burn. You need to move your plant back from the window or put up sheer curtains to help protect it from direct sunlight. As the light intensity decreases in the fall, move your plant closer to the window again. Frequently check their leaves and watch for any fading of their green color, especially on those parts of the leaf closest to the window. This is an early indication that they are being exposed to too much sun.

## **Q: How do I know if I need to re-pot?**

A: A newly potted phalaenopsis should be able to remain in its growth media two years before repotting. When there are many, long roots over the edge of the pot, this plant has most likely been growing for several years since its last repotting. If your plant is not currently in bloom, you should repot now. Be sure to remove all dead roots that are usually dark-colored, soft and mushy. Sometimes they may be dry, with a fiber running through the middle of the root. Center the plant with all of its roots down in the pot and add moistened bark until the level of the bark is just below the bottom of the lower set of leaves. Wait a week before resuming your normal watering and fertilizing routine.