

Tips for Growing Orchids

To grow an orchid.... think like an orchid.

The most popular types of orchids that people usually buy or receive as gifts are the Phalaenopsis (moth orchid) and the Dendrobium (cane orchid). Phalaenopsis orchids have round flowers with a pronounced lip and they grow on a single tall stem arising from fleshy, oval leaves. Flowers are usually white, purple, pink or some combination thereof. Dendrobium orchids usually have smaller flowers that grow in rows on stalks that arise from thick canes, often times with several flower clusters per plant. Flowers are usually white or purple. Dendrobium leaves are narrow and emerge from the center of the plant.

The care for both types of orchids is basically the same, but Dendrobiums like more of everything. More light, more water and more fertilizer. Dendrobiums are robust growers that send up at least one new upright cane every year from creeping rhizomes. Don't cut off old canes as they will sometimes flower or produce Keikis, (babies) that can be potted up on their own.

The golden rule for orchid success is to duplicate the plant's natural conditions as closely as possible. In nature, most orchids are epiphytes, meaning they grow on other objects, clinging to rough bark or even stone. The best conditions for growing orchids are:

- Strong light, but not direct late-afternoon sunlight
- High humidity
- High air flow around the roots
- Alternating drenching watering with regular periods of drying
- Temperatures between 50 and 85 degrees

Orchids can go three to four years without repotting. It may become beneficial to repot if you see excessive amounts of aerial roots and your plant is so root bound it seems to want to get up and walk away. It is best not to disturb a flowering plant, but when your orchid is done blooming and if repotting is necessary cut off the dead flower spike with sterile pruners and repot. Orchids should be potted into specialized orchid pots with orchid potting mix. Orchid pots feature wide drainage slits or air holes in the sides so water will, literally, run through the pot. Orchid potting mixture is usually chunky and made up of pine bark, charcoal, and even styrofoam.

1. Remove it from the plastic pot and carefully remove as much of the moss and bark as you can. Healthy roots should be white and firm, with a small green growing point.
2. Cut away any shriveled, rotten or blackened roots.
3. Set the plant into the pot and fill in around it with potting mixture. Tap the pot to settle bark around the roots. Eventually, new roots will grow through the potting mixture and attach to the pot itself, thus anchoring your plant.

Once it's repotted, find a good spot. An east facing window with a few hours of mild morning sun is perfect. To provide the necessary humidity and catch run-off water, put the plant into a wide, deep tray or saucer and fill the tray with pebbles or gravel.

Tips for Care

Caring for your orchid is simple. During the summer, water it thoroughly every week with a weak solution of a powder or liquid fertilizer. Many people use an all purpose 20/20/20 fertilizer like Peter's or Miracle Gro at quarter strength. Let the water drench the roots and fill up the pebble tray (this will provide extra humidity).

In the winter, keep your plant warm and water once a month or so. Mist it every so often to make sure it stays hydrated. It is not necessary to fertilize during the winter months.

If you see signs of distress, such as yellowing leaves, wrinkled leaves or no blooms, move the plant and keep tweaking your conditions. Once an orchid finds a happy spot, and falls into a routine, the plant should regularly throw out new roots and leaves or canes (depending on the type) and reward you yearly with a beautiful bloom.