

Growing Orchids in the Home

Anyone can grow orchids in the home without living in the tropics or having the luxury of a greenhouse.

Today, houseplants are a regular part of home decoration. If you have ever successfully grown a houseplant, or enjoyed a flowering potted plant, you can grow orchids. The good news is there are plenty of options to give yourself a beautiful display of flowering orchids year round.

Orchids grown in the home during the colder months will respond wonderfully well to being summered outdoors in a protected area. This will also extend the range of plant selections available to you. Be sure to read the companion sheet *Orchids in the Garden and on the Patio*.

LIGHT

No flowering plant will do well without sufficient light. In the home, where most available light is incidental (that is, at an angle, and therefore less intense), plants will need to be fairly close to an east or west, or lightly shaded south, window. A north window will rarely provide adequate light. If light is too intense in a southern exposure, a sheer curtain could be hung to diffuse the light. Extra hours of light will not entirely compensate for poor light quality. Indeed, extending daylength artificially to more than 16 hours can be detrimental to the plants' health and often will prevent flowering.

TEMPERATURE

Orchid plants will be comfortable where you are comfortable. Typical home temperatures of 55° to 60°F at night and 75°F during the day are fine. Guard against excessively low or high temperatures immediately adjacent to glass windows. Some leeway for seasonal fluctuations is allowed, and in some cases, is beneficial, as some plants prefer an autumn chill to induce winter flowering.

HUMIDITY

Rugs, drapes and some furniture can act as giant wicks that absorb the home's humidity, as do heating and air-conditioning systems. Also, it is not advisable to have the home's interior be too wet to accommodate the plants. Solutions: Group plants to take advantage of their collective transpiration (exhaled moisture) or place them on gravel-filled humidity trays to raise the humidity (don't let the plants get "wet feet" by sitting in the water).

WATERING

Care must be taken to balance the rapid surface drying that can take place in the home with the plants' lower metabolic processes resulting from lower light. Each particular type of orchid will retain its basic water needs, whether for moisture or periodic dryness. The home grower also needs to give thought to the logistics of watering. You can carry plants to the sink or even outdoors (when weather allows), or water them in place and remove excessive water so the containers do not sit in water.

FERTILIZER

Fertilize regularly at a low dosage of approximately one-quarter to one-half strength with a fertilizer appropriate to the potting mix in which your plants are grown. Fertilize less often during the winter. As most orchids are grown in soil-free media, use a fertilizer with a nitrogen source that is not based upon urea.

A Selection of Plants for In-Home Growing

Angraecums: Dwarf Madagascan species, fragrant at night; bright light.

Cattleya Alliance Hybrids and Species: Choose miniature types less than 10 inches tall; bright light of southern exposure is best.

Dendrobiums: Dwarf phalaenopsis types, or higher altitude miniatures; bright light at south window required.

Oncidiums: Many types available in flower, best if smaller growing; bright light.

Paphiopedilums: Lady's-slipper orchids grow well under home conditions, giving long-lasting blooms; provide African-violet conditions.

Phalaenopsis: Moth orchids are absolutely the number-one best orchid houseplant; provide African violet conditions.

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