Orchids On The Windowsill

Fact Sheet FS1154



Cattleya



Nun's Cap



Phalaenopsis

Cooperative Extension

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There are so many different species and varieties of orchids that there is no "one formula fits all." However, some generalizations for practical in-home orchid care are suggested here. If you can maintain any houseplants you can keep an orchid.

Roots

The term epiphyte means "on a plant." The majority of orchids native to the tropics are epiphytes where they festoon trees, using the trees only for support. All nutrients are obtained from air, water, and decaying materials caught among their roots. For growth as a houseplant, orchids are planted on (rather than in) potting materials. If roots appear to be "escaping" that is normal, as that is the natural habit of orchid roots. The vellamen (white sheath) surrounding the aerial roots helps in water absorption.

Water

Every four to seven days, when the pot feels light or the potting medium is dry, give enough water so that it drains freely through the pot. A drenching at the kitchen sink is effective. As with any houseplant, do not allow it to sit in its own water. However, in order to increase humidity, pots may be placed on a tray of pebbles filled with water. Usually more water is needed in summer than winter and flowering plants may require more water. Aerial roots should quickly turn green when watered. Water droplets clinging to the roots a few minutes after watering is a good sign of sufficient watering.

Fertilizer

Use a dilute solution of standard balanced (1-1-1 ratio) houseplant fertilizer weekly from April 1st to September 1st. Plants in a bark–based mix need a high nitrogen fertilizer (3-1-1 ratio). Do not fertilize excessively. Continue fertilizing plants in flower.

Cutting the Flower Stalk

When flowering is done the flower spike should be cut at its base with a clean sharp tool except for phalaenopsis that may rebloom if cut between the scar left by the first flower and the last node (swollen, jointed area of the stalk).

Light

East, west or lightly shaded south facing windows provide the best light for orchids in the home. Orchids fare best if they can summer outdoors in light shade. Fluorescent light bulbs provide the best artificial light.

Temperature

House temperatures of 55-60°F at night and 75°F in the day are satisfactory for most species. Beware of excessively high or low temperatures adjacent to windows.

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Repotting

After a year or two the potting medium breaks down and should be replaced, usually in the spring or after flowering is finished. Bags of orchid potting medium can be purchased for use. The container usually can be reused after wiping it with a diluted bleach solution and rinsing.

What Kinds of Orchid Is It?

There are thousands of different orchids in nature, and orchid growers have developed even more varieties. Some of the available orchids are pictured in this fact sheet. For more information contact the American Orchid Society at www.aos.org.



Dendrobium



Paphiopedilum

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