



TAKING CARE OF YOUR FIRST ORCHID

Marilyn H.S. Light

WHAT KIND OF ORCHID IS IT? Knowing what kind it is will assist those helping you care for it.

Phalaenopsis (Moth Orchid) (few broad flat leaves; long sprays of round white, pink or yellow flowers)

Dendrobium (upright leafy stems with sprays of white or purple blooms)

Cymbidium (long narrow leaves; upright stems of many blooms in various colours)

Cattleya (Corsage Orchid) (hard swollen stems and fleshy leaves; large flowers: white, purple or sunset shades)

WHAT IS THE CORRECT OR SCIENTIFIC NAME?

Orchid names get lost, misspelled or otherwise confused along the way. While the KIND of orchid matters to those wanting to grow a plant, the NAME of the plant is also needed for anyone wanting to enter a plant in a show. There are many useful reference books and internet sites. Use a reference to learn the correct spelling. Confirmation that an unusual orchid is correctly named is sometimes a job for a taxonomic specialist.

Generic and species names

Missouri Botanical Garden database (public)

<http://mobot.mobot.org/W3T/Search/vast.html>

International Plant Names Index (public)

www.ipni.org

Hybrid names and awards

Wildcatt Orchids database (commercial product) www.WildcattData.com

WHEN WILL IT BLOOM?

Most orchids bloom in a particular season according to their geographic and climatic heritage. Your orchid will generally re-bloom in the same season each year.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE WITH THE SPENT INFLORESCENCE?

Once flowers have faded and the flower stalk has yellowed, it can be removed using sterilized scissors or a sterile blade. Phalaenopsis frequently rebloom from the old stem where it remains green. In this case, only remove upper parts that have yellowed or dried.

HOW MUCH LIGHT DOES AN ORCHID REQUIRE?

Bright, filtered sunlight or wide spectrum fluorescent light is best for most kinds.

WHAT TEMPERATURE IS APPROPRIATE?

Room temperature; warmer by day, cooler at night. Avoid exposure to cold or hot air drafts.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD THE ORCHID BE WATERED?

Once or twice a week depending on how quickly the growing medium dries out. Water thoroughly, letting the water flow through the pot. Use deionized or rain water once a month to rinse away minerals. Avoid using hard well water.

SHOULD FERTILIZER BE APPLIED? WHAT KIND AND HOW OFTEN?

Use very dilute liquid flowering houseplant or orchid fertilizer with regular watering once every two weeks in summer, once a month in winter. Use one-quarter of the recommended strength.

THE HOME IS DRY IN WINTER. HOW CAN HUMIDITY BE SAFELY MAINTAINED?

Pebble trays are not very effective. Leaves should be misted with deionized water using a sprayer several times daily.

WHEN SHOULD THE PLANT BE REPOTTED? DIVIDED?

Once the potting medium has deteriorated or about every 18 months to two years, you should repot the plant. Orchids can be divided at the same time if desired.

MORE QUESTIONS? Join a local orchid society to learn how to grow and flower orchids!