

Orchids - Basic Growing Information

The orchid is the largest general category in the plant world with more than 25,000 known varieties. They are found in their native state in almost every climate in the world and, therefore, there are one or more orchids which can survive practically anywhere.

Orchids like humidity and are often found in rain forests. Most are also epiphytes, or air plants, and get their needed water from the air. If you want to raise them in a dry area or indoors with either heating or air conditioning, you must increase the humidity for them. The simplest and cheapest way to do it is by using a pan, such as a baking pan. Place rocks in the pan and set the orchid pots on the rocks. Fill the pan halfway up the rocks with water so that the pots are sitting above, not in, the water. Also, mist the plants twice daily with a plastic sprayer filled with plain water.

Most varieties of orchids require regular application of a flowering houseplant type of fertilizer. If you pot your orchids in fir or pine bark, use a high nitrogen fertilizer such as 30-10-10 because the bark depletes nitrogen. Do not use high nitrogen with Hawaiian tree fern (hapu'u), charcoal, rock or similar materials. Instead, use 14-14-14 or equivalent.

Although orchids require a humid environment, their roots must dry out thoroughly in between watering to prevent root rot or fungus disease. Hapu'u, charcoal chunks, number 3 blue rocks or granite provide excellent drainage for this purpose. Bark is also satisfactory but will decay and often must be replaced when repotting.

Phalaenopsis orchids, often referred to by nicknames such as moth or butterfly, do not require much sunlight and do well indoors in low light conditions. Do not place them directly in a sunny window. Most other varieties, such as dendrobium and cattleya, require a lot of sun (ultra-violet light) in order to bloom. In cloudy, rainy areas such as the Pacific Northwest, it will probably be necessary to supplement sunlight with light from an ultraviolet grow lamp at least 8 hours daily during overcast seasons.

Water most orchids occasionally. Overwatering causes leaf chlorosis (yellowing), leaf drop and eventually, plant death. Under watering causes shriveling of the plant and dropping of buds before they have a chance to open. By watching the leaves, you can learn to give your plants the amount of water they require.

Talk to your plants, pay attention to their needs, and good luck! They really are not hard to grow, and they will reward you with much pleasure.