



## Tips on Orchid Growing

Orchids are split into very many different genus groups and within these there are very many species. The most popular orchids sold in garden centres are Phalaenopsis, (Moth orchid). Dendrobium, (Bamboo orchid) and Cymbidium.

### **Phalaenopsis, (Moth orchid)**

These are the easiest and most reliable orchids to grow and can flower up three times a year in any season. They are showy and the flowers can last for many weeks. The flower stems erupt from between beautiful dark glossy green leaves.

### **Cultivation**

- This plant likes a semi-shaded spot with bright light but no scorching sun.
- They grow continuously throughout the year oldest leaves being replaced as they die and often followed by a new flowering cycle.
- They do prefer a nighttime temperature of 15°C and up to a maximum of 30°C in the day, so a heated conservatory or centrally heated houses suite them well. This day/night temperature change is essential to promote flowering.
- Humidity is an essential element to these orchids growth so placing plants on a saucer of moist pebbles will help, so too will a morning spray of rainwater on warm bright days.
- Watering of this orchid should be based on keeping them moist but never wet. Water once a week in summer, less in winter using tepid rainwater when ever possible into the top of the pot, avoiding the crown. Do not allow the plant to sit in water. Should the growing conditions be nearer the upper range then more water may be required.
- Feed your orchid plant once a month with a balanced fertiliser at quarter strength. Or use a specific orchid fertiliser such as made by **Chempak** or **Maxicrop** following the application rates on the label.
- Careful cutting of the flower stem as the last flower fades, but no sooner or later, as the new branch will not develop. This can sometimes encourage extra flowers. Cut above the leafy sheath where the first flower was.
- When the flower stalk turns brown cut off about an inch from the base.
- **Dendrobium (Bamboo Orchid)**

There are two types of Dendrobium they get their common name from the bamboo like stems. They are available as an easy to grow type and one that is more challenging. To tell them apart just look at how they flower.

The easy ones produce their flower spikes from the top of their stems at any time of the year, where as the others have flowers along the length of the stems and only flower in spring.

### **Cultivation**

- The easy to grow type should be grown in the same way as the Moth Orchid, Phalaenopsis. (See above).
- The more challenging spring flowering Dendrobiums put on new growth in the summer and become dormant in winter.
- Grow them in a very light position but away from direct sun. Too little light will inhibit flowering the following year.
- Temperatures for spring & summer, minimum 18°C by day and 15°C at night.
- Temperatures for autumn & winter should be cooler 14°C by day and 10°C at night.
- Dendrobiums enjoy humidity all year so would benefit from the pots being placed on wet gravel.

- They also need good ventilation and it can be difficult to get the balance of high humidity levels with the need for ventilation.
- Watering should be done sparingly during March to June until new growth starts.
- New growth will require watering to increase to weekly and feeding fortnightly until September. Use a high nitrogen fertiliser at half strength or a proprietary product.

### **Cymbidium**

A more demanding orchid to grow. These flower from autumn to spring and produce long lasting large flower spikes.

#### **Cultivation**

- Cymbidiums require lots of light and low temperatures, but no frost.
- Autumn and winter keep them inside in a bright cool place away from direct sunlight.
- The temperature should be no warmer than 10°C-15°C until flower spike has developed.
- The plant can now be grown at a higher temperature app. 20°C. Too warm and flowers do not last.
- Water your plants weekly throughout the year. Use rainwater or filtered tap water.
- Feed your plants every two weeks from autumn to spring and weekly during spring and summer. Use a balanced fertiliser at half strength or use a specific orchid fertiliser such as made by **Chempak** or **Maxicrop** following the application rates on the label.
- To encourage flowering use feeds higher in potash such as tomato feed at half strength and apply weekly in August and September.
- Flower support is essential, as the spikes of blooms are heavy. Use a cane inserted in the centre of the plant rather than the edge where the new root growth develops.

#### **Orchid Repotting**

Always use proper orchid compost when it's time to repot your plant. Orchid compost is formulated to provide a very free draining and porous mixture, which emulates the natural material the orchid would grow in.

Phalaenopsis & Dendrobium orchids do not become pot bound as do Cymbidiums and will only require the compost being 'refreshed' every few years. Do this in the autumn or spring when the plants are not in flower.

Carefully remove the plant from the pot and tease out the old compost and cut away any dead roots or damaged.

Repot in the same container or one that is no larger than 15cm (6") diameter. Carefully work the compost into the roots and tap to firm. Water only sparingly until established when the plant feels firm, this may take up to 6 weeks.

Cymbidiums will only need repotting if very root bound. Do not disturb the root ball, removing only dead or damaged roots prior to repotting in a pot a little larger than the original.

The reinvigorate an old plant lacking in vigour the plant can be divided into 2 or 3 pieces which should have 4 or 5 pseudobulbs. Pot into smaller pots, do not water, and only mist for a few weeks then water sparingly until established.

#### **Orchid Problems**

- Pests that may attack orchids; aphids, scale insect, mealy bug, can be controlled by a fatty acid insecticide or a systemic insecticide such as **Ultimate Bug Killer**. For attacks of red-spider mite use an insecticide based on bifenthrin. Use chemicals safely and always read the label.
- For most fungal problems there are no chemical controls so good growing culture should be practised, careful watering and good ventilation.
- Bud and Flower drop, is usually caused by shock, sudden changes in temperature, light levels or watering even for a short period can cause these symptoms.