



Horticulture Tips - Orchids

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First, happy new year! Seed catalogues have already arrived and I am salivating just thinking about what is in our gardens, when it will push forth, and about the changes we want to create. You may think that I am jumping the gun, that I am all het up, and you may be correct. But it's such an exciting time of year for the gardener that I can hardly contain myself!

Okay, let's begin with what is on our plates or plant stand. Who else received orchids for holiday presents? If you are like me, not knowing so much about these tropical plants, you too might have removed the flower stem once the petals passed and ditched what remained. Right? Some of you know this routine! You've told me!

So, to further our education, check out BevCam TV; you'll find an orchid program on "Get Your Garden Growing". This production airs on channel 8, Mondays 10:30, Wednesdays 4:30, and Fridays 5:30 for the month of January.

If you cannot catch it, here are some of the major details. First, there are more than 25,000 of true species of orchids and over 100,000 hybrid species, in some 835 genera. The ones found inexpensively in super markets and box stores are usually Phalaenopsis, because they are so easy to grow. They are cloned from tissue cultures in Asian warehouses. Also called Moth orchids, there are 30,000 species of this beauty around the world [except in Antarctica]. They live many years if provided appropriate care and will blossom annually.

Orchids are epiphytic which means they grow on trees. The roots grow along the bark or into the air [aerial roots] and the plant grows upward. In the morning, tropical rains pour down on them; then the air dries, the plants dry, and the roots do a curious thing. When these roots turn green during the rains, they are absorbing moisture.



Once the rain ends, they gradually turn white as the root switches functions. Green, they absorb water; white, they exchange O₂ and CO₂. Every morning they get drenched; every afternoon, they breathe.

Sometimes the instructions that come with these plants

say to add an ice cube to the top of the rooting medium. Since there is no natural ice in the tropics, this seems like bad advice. Also, some directions urge a shot glass of water per week. Do they really think that a shot of water is going to saturate those roots like a morning rain? I think not.



Instead, hold the plant in its container over your sink and run tepid water over the roots for five minutes. Tepid feels good! Drain off the excess water and return the plant to its saucer. This is required weekly.



Re-pot annually. Slip the orchid from its pot, pull off any sphagnum moss or bark bits. Drench the roots in a bucket of warm water for a few minutes. Partially fill the pot

with bark chunks or other recommended medium, add the orchid, and fill the pot to the surface with more bark.

Orchids are diurnal which means that they prefer night temperatures around 60-65 degrees and daytime temps around 70-75 degrees. The temps should differ approximately 10 degrees.

Unlike any other plant, all orchids have fused pistils and stamens. Picture a white lily in contrast with its deep red stamen and yellow to greenish pistils.

Finally, we can't per se grow orchids from seed because germination requires a symbiotic fungus not available outside the orchids' native origins.

If you want to explore more information, attend orchid shows, or purchase orchid products, go to www.massorchid.org/. It is a beautiful website and infinitely useful. Good luck with that tropical beauty!

If there is a topic you would like to read about, please send an email to Sandra.