

More Orchid Hints & Suggestions

Growing Orchids in Your Home – Thursday, March 4, 6:30 PM
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Here are a few more suggestions and things to consider in caring for your orchids.

Watering

While orchids can tolerate a wide range of pH, they prefer water with more acid (pH<7.0) than alkaline (pH>7.0). City water tends to be on the alkaline side because they don't want acidic water eating away the water pipes. Burnsville city water is about 7.8 pH or a little less; St. Paul however is over 8.0 pH. I add 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar to a gallon of Burnsville water to lower the pH.

You can find out the pH of your city water by calling the Water Department.

If you are watering by pouring water through the plant, you need to pour it through 4-5 times to insure the medium is wet. The bark when it is dry acts like a sponge. You can wipe up more water with a wet sponge than a dry sponge. Bark behaves the same way and you need to get the bark wet so it will absorb more water.

Fertilizing

There are many product options for fertilizing orchids. Many of the "orchid fertilizers" are on the pricey side, but you can use Miracle-Gro® or Miracid® just as well. It is my understanding that Miracle-Gro® was initially developed as an orchid fertilizer. Comparing the ingredients of Miracle-Gro® or Miracid® to an "orchid fertilizer" seems to support the assertion.

The term weakly weekly, is a clever term, but it really should be weakly every time you water.

Putting your Orchid Outside

It doesn't hurt to put your orchids like to be outside in the summer; they like it. The Phals should be in the shade or mottled shade, e.g. under a tree or on your deck shaded by a tree. Never put them in direct sunlight because the leaves will burn. Water as needed.

Having your orchids outside gives you a chance to "vernalize" them; expose them to cooler temperatures. You can leave your orchids outside until the nighttime temperatures are falling into the 50s. This vernalizing seems to "motivate" Phals to set a spike when they are brought back to the warm temperatures in the house. Some orchids, like cymbidiums, won't spike and bloom unless they are vernalized. I leave my cymbidiums outside even when the nighttime temperatures are in the 30s, but not freezing!

While your orchids are outside it is a good time for some prophylactic pesticide treatments, if you are not opposed to the use of pesticides. I treat mine with a fungicide and a systemic insecticide several times over the summer. Some common systemic insecticides that are approved by AOS for use on orchids are Malathion, Imidacloprid, and Acephate (Orthene).

Bringing your Orchid Inside

Orchids that have been outside need some care before they are brought back inside for the winter. You don't want to introduce any "vermin" into your house that may affect your other orchids or house plants.

1. Inspect the plant of signs of mites, mealy bugs, scale and fungal/bacterial infections and treat as required
2. Immerse the pot in water to remove any hitchhikers living in the medium e.g. sow bugs, earwigs, etc.
3. Wipe the leaves with a damp soft cloth to remove any accumulated dust.

Orchid Sources

1. Orchids Limited
2. Bachman's
3. Sophie's Orchids (mail order only)
4. Home Depot
5. Aldi's
6. Cub
7. Byerly's
8. Trader Joe's
9. Deerwood Orchids

Orchid Reference Materials

There are innumerable Internet sources for orchids and orchid care. A Google of "Orchid Care" yields page after page of sources. There are also "how to" You Tube videos on orchid care that can be helpful. Below are some sources that I find to be highly reliable and research based.

General

1. American Orchid Society - (<http://www.aos.org/>) Everything you ever wanted to know about orchids. Great place to start!
2. Orchids Limited – (<http://orchidweb.com/>) Lots of orchid care videos.
3. Orchid Society of Minnesota – (<https://minnesotaorchidsociety.com>) Helpful videos.

Pests/Diseases

1. Orchid Pests and Diseases by Sue Bottom – Discusses all the pests and diseases you may encounter in the home. Lots of colored pictures which helps identify the problem.

<https://njorchids.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/orchidpestsanddiseasesbysuebottom1.pdf>

2. American Orchid Society – (<http://www.aos.org/>) – Has articles on common pests and diseases