

Collectors Corner Fact Sheet

Phalaenopsis—Moth Orchids



Origin

Phalaenopsis (Butterfly or Moth) orchids with their long graceful stems of beautiful and long-lasting flowers are native to the Philippines and tropical Asia. Modern hybrids have now improved the plant from the original species. Phalaenopsis can be grown quite successfully as indoor plants, providing some consideration is given to their special requirements.

Temperature Phalaenopsis are happiest in a humid atmosphere with plenty of fresh moving air, filtered or artificial light and a minimum temperature of 16C. In such conditions, Phalaenopsis plants will flower for many months, white flowers can last 12 to 20 weeks and pink flowers from 8 to 12 weeks. If the minimum temperature is constantly lower (e.g. 12 C), the plant should still flower regularly, yet the leaves may not grow as large.

To create a humid atmosphere you can either:

- 1). Place your orchid pot inside a larger pot and fill the space between and below with sphagnum moss. Keep the moss wet and this will provide humidity around the plant.
- 2). An upturned pot placed in a deep saucer of pebbles and water will increase humidity. Alternatively, the orchid may be placed on top of a wire tray or rack above a saucer of pebbles and water. The roots of the plant may grow down into the water. If this occurs, there is no need to disturb the roots, but never place the orchid pots permanently in water, as the roots must have a constant flow of air around them.

Watering

Water your plants often enough to keep the potting mix damp, but never soggy wet. The roots need air around them or they'll rot. Try to use water at room temperature when watering, as the use of very cold water on warm leaves can damage the leaf tissue, and lead to fungal infections and pitting on the surface of the leaves. The thick, leathery leaves of the orchid act as a store for water, so any adverse conditions affecting the leaves are detrimental to the plants. Avoid water sitting in the crown (leaf junction), as this can quickly lead to fungal problems.

How often you need to water depends on the air temperature, and the light under which you are growing your plants. During very hot weather, a thorough soaking twice a week, and small waterings or heavy mistings on other days may be required. During winter, growth is slower, so a heavy watering every two weeks with smaller waterings in between, should suffice (depending on room temperature). If you choose to use the double pot method, thoroughly soak the pots, and the sphagnum moss will retain moisture for a few weeks, so less watering will be required.

Position

Phalaenopsis make ideal house plants as they do not require direct sunlight. They may be grown close to a window, but always have some form of curtain to filter direct rays.

Flowering

When the flowers on the initial spike have finished, do not remove the spike unless it dies back to the base, old flower spikes are able to branch and create new flowers, if the old spike is unsightly then cut it down to 30 or 40cm as a supplementary spike can still grow from the nodes of the spike.

Fertilizer

These plants will benefit from a weekly feeding of a general orchid fertilizer, such as Peter's Excel or Campbell's Yellow. Use about twice a month in cooler weather.

Repotting

Any potting medium should have excellent drainage. A medium grade bark (8-18mm) with 10% charcoal chips added is ideal. Take care with the roots when repotting as they easily attach to any surface.

Pests & Disease

For insect infestation such as aphids, use Pyrethrum spray or dust. If mealy bug attack, soak the complete pot and plant in the recommended strength solution of Clensel to which a little methylated spirits is added.

If spots develop on the leaves of the plant, spray with a systemic fungicide. We recommend Fongarid



Good Growing!

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