

# PHALAENOPSIS

*fayl-en-NOP-sis* - The Moth Orchid

An American Orchid Society survey showed that Phalaenopsis have become America's favorite orchid and the second most sold potted plant. Perhaps no other orchid is better suited to home orchid growing. A full size Phalaenopsis can be in bloom for 6 to 8 months out of the year, producing two or more complete spikes per year. The main flowering season is late winter into spring, though commercial growers today can make flowering Phalaenopsis all year round.

**LIGHT:** Phalaenopsis prefer low levels of light. They do best in an east or west window that gets very early or late sun, but without direct sun the rest of the day. They can also be grown in a south-facing window if shaded or kept back from the window. They also do well under artificial light.

**WATER:** Always water orchids in the morning so the plants are dry before night. The top inch of its potting medium should not be either moist or cool - burrow your finger into the medium to test it. Typically they should take about a week to dry out and need water. Water heavily - at the sink is best - then let the plant drain completely. Never let the plant sit in water and do not let water sit in the crown of the plant - it will cause rot. You can mist the roots if there are a lot exposed. **NOTE:** If your Phalaenopsis is potted in sphagnum moss, pinch the top layer of moss; if it feels moist or cool, don't water yet. Orchids in sphagnum may go two weeks or longer between waterings, depending on the growing environment, light and temperature. Remember, far more orchids are killed by over-watering than by going dry.

**TEMPERATURE:** Minimum night temperature of 62 to 65°F is optimum. Temperatures as low as 50° will not harm the plant and are helpful to initiate bloom spikes, but should not be continued for more than a few weeks as the plants are more prone to fungus at these temperatures. Day temperatures between 75-85°F.

**HUMIDITY:** 50% to 70%. Good air movement is essential if your humidity is extremely high.

**FERTILIZER:** Must be provided on a regular basis because most potting media have little. The exact fertilizer you use will depend on the mix in which your plant is growing. A good general rule is to use a balanced (10-10-10, 12-12-12 or similar ration) fertilizer if potted in sphagnum moss, "weakly, weekly." That is, fertilize every week at one quarter to one half of the recommended dilution. Use a 30-10-10 if potted in a bark mix.

**POTTING:** The roots of Phalaenopsis are very sensitive to salt (fertilizer) and mineral (water quality) build up in the medium. Also, over the course of one year, new roots will grow out of the pot. This is normal as this plant has almost a vine like growth habit. As the medium is also composting, it is recommended to completely remove and replace the medium on a yearly basis. The new roots can be safely tucked into the new pot and the plant will continue to grow and bloom for another year. Repotting is best immediately after a bloom spike has finished and before new buds are the size of peas.

**PESTS:** Mealy bugs are the number one problem for Phalaenopsis. The first line of defense is always simple removal. A ball of cotton or light finger pressure and a stream of warm water can be used to wipe any insects and their debris off of the leaves. A horticultural or neem oil spray can then be used to smother the insects and their eggs. The same techniques can be used on scale insects if they become a problem. It is best to examine your plants on a regular basis, as early detection and control is always more effective than trying to control a major infestation.

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