

Growing indoor tropical plants has become a common part of interior design and it's not unusual for people to have a variety of both foliage and flowering potted plants. The orchid is not generally utilized most plant enthusiasts in their homes. This general attitude occurs because the prospect of growing these expensive plants may scare away most people. There is no big secret to growing orchids. You don't need a heated greenhouse to grow them with success. There are several species that will be quite happy to live on a windowsill and provide a floral display that can last for months. These helpful hints can help you see that orchids are not hard to grow if you have the right knowledge.

Here are two good orchid choices for the home.

Phalaenopsis - Moth Orchid

America's favorite orchid according to the American Orchid Society. This easily grown orchid produces sprays of large moth shaped blooms that last for months. Choose a window facing east or west for bright light without direct sunlight. Water regularly and avoid letting the potting mix dry out. Apply a balanced fertilizer at half the recommended rate every couple of weeks. Repot the orchid every one or two years making sure the pot is large enough to accommodate the root mass.

Paphiopedilums - Lady's Slipper Orchid

This orchid is another good choice because they grow well under shady conditions. A window facing east or west will provide the best light. These plants should remain moist and should be watered once or twice a week. Fertilize like the moth orchid using a balanced fertilizer at half the recommended rate every two weeks. Repot the orchid when the mix decomposes, probably every two years or so.

There are other orchids species that will grow under home conditions, but these two orchids are ideal for the novice grower. You can go to the American Orchid Society's web page at www.orchidweb.org for more extensive information on growing all types of orchids.

Now that you have your orchids you must give them the proper care which includes the following elements:

Water - The most important factor in caring for any houseplant, especially orchids, is water, so don't over water your plants.

Potting mix - Most orchids are epiphytes which don't grow in the soil, but instead attach themselves by means of spongy roots to trees, shrubs, and sometimes rocks. From these perches they are able to absorb water and essential nutrients. Orchids require a special potting mix of tree fern bark, or a mixture of redwood bark chips, charcoal, and large pieces of perlite. The latter mixture is known commercially as orchid mix and is readily available in bagged quantities. This potting mix allows for quick drainage and air movement around the roots - ideal for healthy plants.

Light - Proper light is essential for flower production and overall healthy appearance of plants. Too much light will scorch foliage while not enough sunlight makes the plant becomes spindly and unhealthy.

Temperature - Orchids grow well under average home temperatures (between 50 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit).

Humidity - 40 to 70 percent is ideal. This condition can be achieved in the home by placing the pots on top of some pebbles in a shallow tray with water.

Fertilizer - Use a liquid soluble fertilizer at half the recommended rate every couple of weeks.