

# Orchids

Orchids are often stereotyped as being difficult plants that require the temperature and humidity extremes of a tropical rainforest. Although some orchids *do* need these conditions, most can be grown under normal household conditions.

In general, there are seven basic cultural requirements for growing orchids. They are listed here alphabetically, not in order of importance:

**Air Circulation-** In nature, orchids receive fresh air and gentle breezes daily. The hobbyist can reproduce this condition using a slow turning fan and avoiding smoke polluted air.

**Fertilization-** Most orchids like to be fed with a half-strength solution of fertilizer and water during or immediately following a normal watering. A balanced formula is appropriate for year round use. Or, a grow formula, with higher nitrogen, is used when the leaves or pseudo bulbs are growing, and a bloom formula, with higher phosphorus, is used to promote flowering.

**Humidity-** Most orchids need humidity of around 50%. This can easily be accomplished by placing the plant on a pebble tray that is partially filled with water. To avoid root rot, the pot must not sit in water.

**Light-** Most orchids require filtered sunlight year round to grow and bloom well. The color of the leaves is often a good indicator of the amount of light the plant is receiving. Dark green leaves usually mean not enough sunlight, while yellow leaves indicate too much sun. Strive for medium green leaves.

**Potting Media-** Most orchids are epiphytic (grow on trees) and require a course, airy potting mixture. Choices for media, used in combination or alone, include fir bark, redwood bark, coir fiber, charcoal, sphagnum moss, chunk peat moss, lava rock, osmunda fiber, etc. Orchids like to be pot bound and to have their media changed every two years. Pots can be either clay or plastic.

**Temperature-** Most orchids require normal daytime household temperatures of 70 to 85 degrees F, and night temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees F.

**Watering-** Most orchids like to receive a thorough watering once a week. Pour water on top of the media long enough to allow water to run out the bottom of the pot. Never let orchids sit in water, or the roots will rot. Also avoid getting water on the leaves as this often causes leaf rot or bacterial diseases. Before using, allow water to sit overnight to off-gas chlorine.

Like other plants, orchids occasionally attract unwanted pests such as Mealybug, Scale insects, Aphids, Slugs, and Mites. To remove insects, wipe off with a Q-Tip dipped in water. For more severe infestations there are effective organic sprays available.



## Retail Locations

5258 River Road  
Bethesda, MD 20816  
301-656-3311

[americanplant.net](http://americanplant.net)

7405 River Road  
Bethesda, MD 20817  
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## Landscape Design

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## Eight Easy to Grow Orchids

**Cattleya:** The “Queen of Orchids” can be found wild in Central and South America. Pronounced “Kat-lee-a”, this orchid produces several large showy and often fragrant blooms each year. The flowers are short lived (2-3 weeks), but are generally regarded as the most beautiful and colorful of all orchid flowers. The Cattleya orchid is most commonly associated with corsages. The Cattleya only blooms on its newest growth and prefers direct east, west, or filtered southern exposure light.

**Dendrobium:** The “Hawaiian Lei” orchid grows naturally in New Guinea and Australia. Pronounced “Den-DROH-bee-um”, this orchid can be categorized into one of two types: Phalaenopsis type whose flowers closely resemble a Phalaenopsis orchid flower, and Antelope type, whose flower petals are thin, point straight up and look like antelope horns. Dendrobiums flower for 6-8 weeks and have the advantage of being able to bloom from old growth as well as new. Ideal light exposure is direct east, west or filtered south. While growing new pseudo-bulbs, it is normal for the plant to shed some old leaves. Flower color is white, lavender or an array of art shades.

**Oncidium:** The “Dancing Lady” orchid is native to Central and South America. Pronounced “On-SID-ee-um”, this orchid produces a large showy spray of 1 inch fluorescent yellow, brown, white, or pink flowers. This plant is also available in a miniature version called an Equitant. Blooms last 4-6 weeks. Light exposure is direct east, west or filtered south.

**Paphiopedilum:** The “Lady Slipper” orchid is native to South East Asia. Pronounced “Paff-ee-o-PED-i-lum” this orchid is popular for two reasons. First, a very unusual pouch-like dark purple or green flower emerges annually and lasts 3-4 months. Second, the mottled foliage is very attractive. The Paphiopedilum orchid requires bright indirect light, remains compact and is ideal for growing under fluorescent lights.

**Phalaenopsis:** The “Moth” orchid is native to the Philippines, New Guinea, Indonesia, and Australia. Pronounced “Phal-en-OP-sis”, this orchid is quickly becoming the most popular of all orchids. The white or pastel flowers display themselves gracefully on an arching spray that lasts at least three months. The Phalaenopsis orchid requires bright indirect light, remains compact and is ideal for growing under fluorescent lights. It is equally important not to let water stand in the center of this plant since crown rot is likely. After the flowers drop, cut the stem off near the base. Each year the plant will grow a new set of leaves on top and will, sometime, drop the oldest leaves.

**Miltonia:** The “Pansy Orchid” is pronounced “mil-TOH-nee-ah”. Unusual to orchids, many Miltonia varieties are fragrant, with a scent similar to a rose's. At certain times of the day, usually morning or afternoon, some Miltonias that seem barely scented can give off a heavy fragrance. Miltonias do best in bright, indirect light indoors and moderate room temperatures. Found in the Andes in nature, Miltonias are considered cool-weather orchids that like cool to and moderate room temperatures and to be indoors in bright, indirect light. They prefer to be kept evenly moist, so expect to check them for water twice per week.

**Cymbidium:** Pronounced “sym-BID-ee-um”, Cymbidiums are native to the foothills of the Himalayas. They feature long-lasting winter flowers, clean gorgeous foliage and the most spikes available. Considered an emblem of good fortune in many Asian cultures, the yellow varieties are a favorite for Chinese New Year. Cymbidiums like to be watered every 4–7 days. The potting medium should be kept evenly moist; don't allow it to dry out. They like to be in bright light indoors and may also be kept outdoors in filtered light in moderate climates. Just be sure to protect them from extreme cold.

**Masdevallia:** Commonly referred to as the “Kite Orchid” because their blooms are almost triangular-shaped and have what looks like kite-tails coming off of each sepal. Pronounced “mas-deh-VAHL-lee-ah,” Masdevallia orchids originate from the cool, misty mountains of the New World. This orchid requires bright indirect light and their roots should be allowed to become almost dry before watering again.



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