

## Care of your Phalaenopsis Orchid

The Phalaenopsis that you receive has been grown in moderate light greenhouse conditions that are probably similar to those of your home, so should adapt quickly. In nature, Phalaenopsis are epiphytic orchids, growing on trees where they experience low to moderate light levels. Phalaenopsis typically have thick, succulent leaves, but no pseudobulbs, so the leaves and roots are the main areas for moisture storage. If the leaves are smooth and firm feeling, the plant is getting plenty of water. If the leaves become limp or shriveled, this means that it needs water or that the roots have rotted and it can no longer take up water. Because Phalaenopsis have less water storage capacity than many other types of orchids, it is best to keep them slightly moist most of the time, but it is OK to let them dry out completely between waterings. If the plant is potted, never allow the pot to stand in water. When watering, take care not to leave water standing in the crown, because this can cause crown rot. To remove the excess water, just tip the plant sideways and the water will run out, or blot it with a tissue or paper towel.

Hybrid phals have been bred to grow in pots and take lots of abuse, but Phalaenopsis species are best grown mounted, over the long haul. Phals should be potted in a medium that allows air to reach the roots. Chunky bark is good, as is sphagnum moss, provided it is not packed too tightly and allowed to dry out completely between waterings. In either case good drainage is important. If you have nowhere to hang mounted plants, it's easy to set the mount upright in a clay pot (no medium). You can then grow it with your other potted plants. It will probably need to be watered more frequently, especially if you have low humidity. If potted, it will almost inevitably grow roots that extend outside the pot, and these may eventually be the majority of roots. This is normal for an epiphytic plant such as an orchid. Never cut live roots from a Phalaenopsis or any other kind of orchid. During growing season feed Phalaenopsis every 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> watering with a general-purpose fertilizer. Feeding can be reduced or stopped when plants are resting or in flower.

Most Phalaenopsis bloom in late winter and spring. Flowering is typically initiated by a reduction in day length and cooling, and will usually occur in normal home conditions. A 20-degree difference between day and night temperatures is ideal to initiate blooming. The flower spike originates from somewhere along the stem of the plant, as do the aerial roots. Phalaenopsis flowers are some of the longest-lasting of all orchids, with the same flowers persisting for up to 6 months. Once the plant has finished blooming and the spike has dried out, you may cut it off. Some phal species (e.g., *Phal cornu-cervi*) may bloom continuously for years from a single spike, and some may form keikis (baby plants) as well as flowers (e.g., *Phal luedemanniana*). Phalaenopsis keep growing upward on a single growth, continuously adding new leaves, and bloom repeatedly from that growth. Some Phalaenopsis species are deciduous, losing their leaves at certain times of year. These include *wilsonii*, *parishii*, *lobbii*, *braceana*, *taenialis*, and others. These species can tolerate cold temperatures in winter, provided they are not kept too wet. Under cold conditions they will lose their leaves. These species may also drop their leaves if stressed by drought and/or high temperatures. If you have a deciduous species that drops its leaves, it is not dead! Don't throw it away! As long as the roots are alive, it will remain dormant for a while, then start growing leaves (and possibly flowers) again.

Many of the seedlings that we sell come potted in sphagnum moss because we have found that immature plants stay healthiest and grow fastest that way. They can usually continue to be grown in the moss for another year, but can also be potted into a medium of your choice or mounted.

Enjoy your orchid! If you have any questions about caring for your orchid, feel free to contact us by e-mail or phone.

olympicorchids@gmail.com  
206-229-7919