

Orchids in the Garden

Properly selected and cared for, orchids can be among the showiest and most exotic of all garden or patio plants. There are many areas throughout the South Africa where temperatures for a good portion of the year are compatible with the needs of many orchids. Some coastal areas are nearly frost-free year round. In these areas, with some protection from excessive sun, wind and rain, lovely orchid plants can be successfully cultivated on the patio or as a part of the landscape. In frost-free areas, the plants can be left in place all year. Where frost or temperatures below 5 C threaten, plants can be brought into the home to be grown on windowsills or on an unheated patio where the coldest temperatures are avoided. The trick is in selecting plants that are already adapted to your particular area. First, though, consider some basic cultural needs of the plants.

LIGHT

No flowering plant will do well in deepest shade, and orchids are no exception. Orchids generally come from environments where dappled light is the norm. The hotter the sun, the more midday shade is required. In humid or coastal areas, more sun can be given. The required amount of light will also dictate your selection of plants. If you can offer only one light situation, select only plants that can do well under those conditions. Most orchids like direct early morning sun up to ten o'clock keep them shade during other times

TEMPERATURE

In most cases, you will be limited to whatever Mother Nature provides, eased only by the amount of shade you supply. Generally, there are many lovely orchids that will do well in the temperature range from 5 to 35 C. Your particular temperature conditions will influence your choice of plants.

HUMIDITY

Most areas with satisfactory temperatures will have adequate humidity. Anywhere from 40 percent and up will do. Only in the deserts will it be unsatisfactory. In such areas, grouping orchids with other plants can create a microclimate that will suit them.

WATERING

This will depend greatly on your plant selection, and whether the plants are grown under cover. In general most orchids require at least some air circulation around their roots yet are intolerant of excessive moisture at the roots. Water twice a week in summer to once a week in winter

FERTILIZER

Fertilize (Nitrosol, Chemilcult, Multifeed P etc.) regularly at a low dosage of approximately one-quarter strength with a fertilizer appropriate to the potting mix in which your plants are grown. Fertilize less often during the winter.

A Selection of Plants

Cattleya Alliance Hybrids Especially good are hybrids with *Laelia anceps* in their ancestry; half sun, temperature-tolerant.

Cymbidiums Well suited to Gauteng, provide extra humidity; likes bright conditions.

Epidendrums Especially the brilliant reed-stem types; need almost full sun, temperature-tolerant.

Oncidiums Many types available in flower, best with Cymbidiums; bright light.