

# Phalaenopsis

Phalaenopsis, the moth orchid, is perhaps the best orchid for growing in the home, and is also a favorite with greenhouse growers. Well-grown plants can flower often, sometimes with a few flowers throughout the year, though the main season is late winter into spring. Average home temperatures and conditions are usually sufficient.

**Light** is easy to provide for phalaenopsis. They grow easily in a bright window, with little or no sun. An east window is ideal in the home; a shaded north window is acceptable. In a greenhouse, shade must be given; 70 to 85 percent shade is recommended. No shadow should be seen if you hold your hand one foot above a plant's leaves.

**Temperatures** for phalaenopsis should usually be above 18°C at night, and range between 24 to 30°C or more during the day. Although higher temperatures force faster vegetative growth, higher humidity and air movement must accompany higher temperatures, the recommended maximum being 32 to 35°C. Night temperatures to 18°C are desirable for several weeks in the autumn to initiate flower spikes. Fluctuating temperatures can cause bud drop on plants with buds ready to open.

**Water** is especially critical for phalaenopsis. Because they have no major water-storage organs other than their leaves, they must never completely dry out. Plants should be thoroughly watered and not watered again until nearly dry. In the heat of summer in a dry climate, this may be every other day; in the winter, it may be every 10 days. Water only in the morning, so that the leaves dry by nightfall, to prevent rot.

**Humidity** is important to phalaenopsis, the recommended humidity being between 50 and 80 percent. In humid climates, as in greenhouses, it is imperative that the humid air is moving. Leaves should be dry as soon as possible, always by nightfall. In the home, set the plants on trays of gravel, partially filled with water, so that the pots never sit in water.

**Fertilise** on a regular basis, especially if the weather is warm, when the plants are most often growing. Twice-a-month applications of high-nitrogen fertiliser are appropriate. When flowering is desired, a high-phosphorus fertiliser can be applied to promote blooming. Some growers apply fertiliser at one-quarter strength with every watering; this is best for warm, humid conditions. When cooler, fertiliser should be applied once a month at weak strength.

**Re-potting** is best done in the spring, immediately after flowering. Phalaenopsis plants must be potted in a porous mix. Potting is usually done every one to three years. Mature plants can grow in the same container until the potting medium starts to decompose, usually in two years. Root rot occurs if plants are left in a soggy medium. Seedlings usually grow fast enough to need repotting yearly, and should be repotted in a fine-grade medium. Mature plants are potted in a medium-grade mix. To repot, remove all the old medium from the roots, trim soft, rotted roots, and spread the remaining roots over a handful of medium in the bottom of a new pot. Fill the rest of the pot with medium, working it among the roots, so that the junction of the roots and the stem is at the top of the medium.