

YES, YOU CAN GROW ORCHIDS INDOORS!

How often have you heard that orchids are difficult to grow in your home? The truth is that while some orchids do require special growing conditions, there are hundreds that will thrive on a windowsill or under artificial lights. As few as a dozen carefully selected plants can provide orchids in bloom almost year-round.

Demonstrated here are different setups for growing orchids indoors. The secret to success is choosing plants that are best suited to the growing environment. Most orchids fail to bloom because of inadequate light or temperatures that are too consistent. No matter what your situation, there are a few important factors to consider in order to grow orchids successfully indoors:

LIGHT - This is usually the most limiting factor. Orchids may be segregated by the amount of light they need and are referred to as those needing 'Low,' 'Medium,' and 'High' light. 'Low' light is defined as about 1000–1500 foot candles, 'Medium' light as about 1500–2500 foot candles, and 'High' light as 3000 foot candles or more. The intensity of light on a windowsill depends on the window's exposure: north- and east-facing windows have less light than south- and west-facing windows. Artificial light can be used to supplement natural light or to replace it entirely.

TEMPERATURE - Temperature can also be a limiting factor. Orchids can be classified as cool, intermediate, or warm growers. Most home environments are best suited to orchids that prefer intermediate temperatures, e.g., about 65-75°F during the day and 55-65°F at night. If your growing environment is warmer or cooler than this, choose different types of orchids accordingly.

HUMIDITY - Most cultivated orchids are epiphytic plants from humid, tropical climates that grow on tree trunks or branches. They prefer the humidity to be 50% or higher. Grouping your plants together will help. However, if you are serious about growing orchids, a room humidifier will combat the dryness from climate, winter heating, or summer air conditioning.

WATER - Most orchids prefer to dry out a bit between waterings. A few, such as slipper or moth orchids, like to stay more evenly moist. When watering, drench the pots thoroughly, drain completely, and never let them sit in water. Tepid water is preferred, and it is better if the foliage dries by nightfall. Remember that far more orchids are killed from over-watering than from being too dry. When in doubt, water tomorrow!

FERTILIZER - Orchids need fewer nutrients than most other plants. However, the judicious use of fertilizer will promote better growth and flowering. Use a balanced orchid fertilizer and follow the instructions on the package. Plants respond better when fertilizer is applied during active growth, e.g., in spring and summer; fertilize less often in the cooler winter months. Fertilize your orchids after watering, not when they are dry.

PESTS - Insect pests can be gently washed or scraped off your plant, or treated with an insecticidal soap or fine horticultural oil. Be sure to read and follow all instruction labels on insecticides carefully, and only use those recommended for indoor consumer use. Many good orchid growers isolate newly purchased orchids for a few weeks so any pests can be taken care of before they spread problems throughout a collection.

AN OUTDOOR VACATION - Orchids grown indoors, especially those in 'Low' light conditions, will benefit from a summer vacation outdoors. For the Mid-Atlantic states, the outdoor season runs from about Mother's Day to Labor Day. After the weather settles in the spring, place your orchids outside in the shade. Gradually move them to a location where they can get bright indirect light or dappled sunlight for most of the day. Take care to monitor the rainfall, as you may have to water or cover your orchids to insure they stay appropriately moist. Remember – too frequent watering is still not a good thing for an orchid in a pot even when it is outside. Bring your orchids back inside before the nighttime temperatures drop below 60°F.

Your local orchid society is usually the best place to gain important information on which varieties do well in your area. For more information visit the National Capital Orchid Society at www.ncos.us.