

Caring for

orchids

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Cymbidiums, also known as the boat orchid, are prized for their long-lasting sprays of flowers, used especially as cut flowers or for corsages in the spring.

Question: I've been given several orchids as a gift. What do I need to consider in keeping them beautiful and healthy?

Answer: Orchids are becoming increasingly popular as flowering houseplants. Orchids are in the family Orchidaceae (or-kid-ACE-ee-ee). There are about 25,000 species, making orchids one of the largest families of flowering plants in the world. The majority of the orchids grown as indoor houseplants are native to the tropical and subtropical areas of South America.

Orchids are quite hardy, and can survive many years in the home with proper care. Orchids are valued most for their delicate flowers, which are available in a wide variety of colors. The blooms can last from one week to four months, depending on the species.

The three most important things to consider in caring for orchids are light, moisture, and temperature.

Orchids won't flower if there



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is inadequate light. Orchids grow best when placed on a south-facing windowsill. If the sun shines directly through the window, use a sheer curtain to gently diffuse the light. The next best choices are an east-facing window, then west and finally a north-facing window. If none of your windows provide adequate light, use artificial light. Orchids will do well under the florescent lights in an office.

To allow the orchid to receive optimum light, gently wipe the dust off the leaves as needed.

Most orchids are tolerant of inconsistent watering. To keep the flowers at their best, allow the potting soil to dry out a bit between watering. The frequency of watering will depend on the temperature and light levels



The cattleya, also known as the corsage orchid or the queen of orchids, was extremely popular as a cut flower in the United States in the 1950s.

in your home. To figure out the need for watering, stick your finger about 1 inch into the soil. If the soil feels dry, water. If the soil feels wet, wait. Avoid using cold water (below 50F). Cold water can damage the roots.

Humidity is also important to orchids since they can pull moisture from the air through their roots. Orchids do best in a range of 50%-70% relative

humidity. There are several easy ways to increase humidity.

■ Group your orchids together, and if you like, group orchids with other houseplants. Plants increase air moisture as part of their breathing process.

■ Use a humidifier. Air conditioners and heaters dry the air, so avoid placing your plants near the vents or ducts.

■ Create a humidity tray

which is simply a shallow tray filled with pebbles or gravel and filled with water. Take care that the bottoms of the pots are not actually sitting in the water, since this can cause root disease.

Most orchids grown indoors prefer about the same temperature range as humans do. Keep the temperature set around 70-80F during the day and 60-70F at night. Orchids will flower best if there is about a 10 degree drop at night. They like the fluctuating temperatures. Orchids do not thrive when daytime temperatures are consistently over 85F. If your orchids are growing under artificial lights, there will be a temperature drop when the lights are turned off.

Keep these three general care tips in mind, and you should experience great success in keeping your orchids beautiful and healthy.

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