

Commonly known as the Moth Orchid, Phalaenopsis orchids are well suited for home orchid growing. Plants with long-lasting sprays of lovely moth-like blooms in a broad array of colors are inexpensive and widely available, ready to give weeks of pleasure in the home or office. Modest light and consistent moisture are the keys to their relative ease of culture. The main flowering season is late winter into spring, though commercial growers today can make flowering Phalaenopsis available year around.

Light: Sufficient light is important for healthy growth and flower production. Provide bright light; no direct sun. In the home choose an east, west or shaded south window. In a greenhouse environment, provide about 30 percent full sun; if using grow lights, use four 40-watt fluorescent tubes and two 40-watt incandescent bulbs directly over plants. Foliage should be naturally semi-erect and of a medium olive green color. Dark green, limp foliage indicates too little light.

Temperature: Mature plants need a 15 to 20 degree difference between night and day. Nighttime temperatures of 60-65 degrees and day temperatures of 75-85 degrees are ideal. Seedlings need temperatures 5 to 10 degrees higher than mature plants.

Water: Mature plants should seldom dry out between watering. Seedlings need more constant attention to moisture levels.

Humidity: Phalaenopsis need 60-70% humidity. In the home, place plants on trays of moistened pebbles. In the greenhouse, use a humidifier if conditions are too dry.

Fertilizer: Phalaenopsis must be fed on a regular basis. The exact fertilizer used will depend on the mix in which the plant is growing. A general rule is to use a balanced (10-10-10, etc.) fertilizer weakly, weekly; fertilize every week at 1/4 to 1/2 of the recommended formula.

Potting: Re-potting should be done every one to two years before the mix breaks down too far and is best done in late spring after the main flowering season. Use a well-draining but water-retentive mix. Select the new pot based on root mass, not top size.