

CosMic Plants

the art of orchids

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Phalaenopsis Care Information

General

The Phalaenopsis orchid is a plant that grows in the tropics. It is particularly found in the tropical regions of Australia and South-east Asia. Phalaenopsis orchids usually grow on trees, but also on airy soil (humus), on rocks or in crevices. If you would like to find them growing wild, your best chance would be in the vicinity of brooks and rivers.

Phalaenopsis belongs to the plant group of epiphytes, “air plants” which grow on other plants but without taking nutrients from the host. Phalaenopsis orchids live on nutrients left by birds on the tree-stump and on nutrients carried by rainwater. Since Phalaenopsis orchids must be able to easily collect the nutrients, its roots are very sensitive which is both its strength and its weakness. It does not need much nutrition and water to grow and to flower, but if the roots are over abundantly digesting nutrients they will burn, rot or die off.

Phalaenopsis is also known as the moth- or butterfly orchid. “Phalaen” is Greek for butterfly and “op sis” means “resembles” or “looks like”. The plant derives this name from the shape of its flowers which resemble a butterfly.

Location

In nature Phalaenopsis orchids grow in quite sheltered spots. It makes sense therefore to place the orchid in a bright spot in the room but to avoid full sunlight. A place towards the (north) west or (south) east is best. A south-facing window is less suitable unless a window overhang or curtains protect the plant from direct sunlight (especially during the months of May to September). It is also advisable to avoid placing the plant in a location where it could be affected by cold drafts or central heating, which may result in withering buds. Never place your Orchid close to ripening fruit, as the ripening process produces ethylene which is a natural plant aging hormone. Ripening fruit will therefore shorten the blooming period of your Orchid!

Temperature

The ideal temperature lies between 18°C and 23°C (room temperature). After the plant has finished flowering, it is recommended to move it to a slightly cooler location (a bedroom or a basement) at approximately 15°C and 18°C, which will encourage the development of new flower spikes. During this simulated “winter-period” to encourage re-flowering, the Orchid still needs light! When the start of a new flower spike is visible, the plant may be placed back in its usual location with warmer temperatures again.

Watering

In their tropical climate, orchids are accustomed to absorbing lots of water in a short time and subsequently nothing for a long time. The best thing to do therefore is to immerse the growers pot in a bucket of water (or your sink) or to temporarily fill up the decorative cover pot with water. Leave the growers pot to soak (for approximately 5 minutes to half an hour) and then drain it thoroughly until all excess water has dripped out. If you filled the decorative cover pot with water to saturate the growers pot, make sure to completely empty it! The plant will then not need watering for 7 to 10 days. Never let the growers pot with the orchids’ roots sit in water for more than an hour. Orchid roots need to be able to “breath”!

Fertilization

Special orchid fertilizer is available in every garden center. Please only use that fertilizer. Fertilize the plant twice monthly from March to October. Once monthly will suffice during the other months. Make sure that you only use the dosage recommended by the fertilizer manufacturer.

After flowering

Once a flower spike has finished flowering, you can make the Phalaenopsis orchid flower again. To do so, it is recommended to cut the spike off just above the first bract, counting from the base at the bottom. A Phalaenopsis spike shows various “bulges” which are called “bracts”. Each bract has the potential to produce a new flower spike, and if you see a new shoot starting from a bract higher than the lowest one, cut the bloomed-out part off right above that new shoot.



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Repotting

Once Phalaenopsis has finished flowering, the plant does not need to be repotted. It is very normal for Orchid roots to grow outside the pot, as in nature the orchid roots are completely exposed to air as well! Repotting is only required if the pot is entirely filled with roots or if the potting compost has decayed completely. Use only special orchid potting compost for repotting. It is available at almost every garden center. Never repot orchids during flowering.

Other recommendations

As mentioned above, Phalaenopsis orchids tend to have aerial roots growing outside the pot. This is a sign that the plant feels comfortable, so just leave the roots where they are. You need not put them back into the pot either, as this may damage the plant.

If you wish to place the Phalaenopsis in a decorative pot, do not remove the growers pot. Removing the growers pot will damage vital roots. Leaving the growers pot on will allow you to easily remove the plant from the decorative pot for watering and you can still immerse the inner growers pot in a bucket of water or by temporarily filling the decorative pot with water (don’t forget to empty it! Phalaenopsis orchid roots need air!)

A Fascinating fact

Is Phalaenopsis an expensive plant? At first sight, yes, Phalaenopsis orchids seem to be the more expensive flowering house plants. We would rather call it an exclusive house plant. After all, how much would a nice flower arrangement cost? Indeed, at least as much. Phalaenopsis orchids however will please you for months and months, whereas a bouquet will certainly have finished flowering after two weeks. The fact that Phalaenopsis orchids can be made to flower again makes the plant unique. A Phalaenopsis orchid is therefore more than your money’s worth!

We wish you a lot of pleasure with your Phalaenopsis!

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