

Wm. Wheat & Son

THE FLOWER & GARDEN CENTRE

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Gardeners Guide to:

Phalaenopsis Orchids

There are thousands of extremely variable forms of Orchids but probably the most popular is the Phalaenopsis type known as the Moth Orchid that originates from the forests of Southeast Asia - they become more popular each year.

Because orchids take a long time to grow to flowering stage and require high heat and light, most commercial production is restricted to tropical areas where plants can be produced at low energy cost. Orchids are protected under the convention for international trade of endangered species, propagation is by tissue culture as seedlings are extremely variable and not suitable for commercial production. Young plants start their life with specialist breeders and are propagated in South East Asia and the Philippines being transported to growers in northern Europe when the flower spike has formed for potting on and finishing ready for sale.



Orchids evolved growing on tree branches and rotting vegetation and on the forest floor near streams so growers try to simulate the natural soil conditions by growing plants in compost consisting of large chunks of hardwood bark mixed with cork and coconut husk.

It is almost certain that if you buy or receive a phalaenopsis orchid it will be in flower, a slender spike with up to six individual flowers at various stages of development. New flowers are formed as buds at the tip of the spike as the oldest flowers fade. An individual spike may flower for up to three months. Eventually the flower spike stops producing new buds and all that is left is the stem. After flowering cut back the flowering spike above the third bud or eye and your phalaenopsis should produce some more flowers in a few months time.

It is worth noting that the flowers are particularly sensitive to ethylene gas damage. Ripening fruit produces ethylene as do decaying flowers, so never place by a dish of fruit and always remove flowers from the spike as they fade. Watering and temperature are critical but with modern centrally heated homes easy to maintain. Never let the temperature fall below 55oF as leaf droop will occur and encourage the onset of disease, a room temperature of 65 to 70oF is ideal. The best position is near an east window where it will get plenty of light.

Phalaenopsis are very easy to over water, so take care, but never let them dry out completely (feel the weight of the plant as a guide, if dry it will be light).

Water well, with rainwater if possible, and then let the plant dry out, never stand in water as this causes the roots to rot. Being a native of the tropics Phalaenopsis like high humidity. Standing them on a tray with gravel and water in the base as the water evaporates helps to create a mini humid environment around the plant.

As the plant is growing in compost consisting mostly of wood, that over time starts to decay it absorbs in the process a large amount of nitrogen which the plant needs for growth, so it is important to feed regularly to keep the plant growing. Add fertiliser at every other watering at half the recommended strength.

Never place your orchid near a door or window where they are subjected to blasts of cold air. Remember they originally come from a tropical climate.

So the things to remember are, do not over water – place in a light easterly position at room temperature away from fruit and other flowers – cut back to three buds after flowering, easy -- enjoy your exotic orchid.