Orchid Care

for healthy growth and beautiful blooms

A practical, evidence-informed guide to caring for your Phalaenopsis orchid at home.

A NESTTIDY GUIDE



Start by knowing your orchid

Most advice in this guide is for Phalaenopsis hybrids grown indoors in a bark-based mix.

An orchid is not just one plant

The orchid family is wonderfully diverse. Phalaenopsis, also known as the moth orchid, has broad, leathery leaves and thick, fleshy roots. Its flowers often last for many weeks or even months.

Many Phalaenopsis grow naturally on trees. They are not parasites: their roots help anchor the plant and absorb water. At home, the roots need an airy growing mix and good drainage.

One important distinction

Cymbidium, Dendrobium and Oncidium may need different temperatures and watering routines. Check the plant label; you will find a short comparison on page 14.

Inside this guide

03-05 Light, roots and watering.

06-08 Feeding, repotting and care after flowering.

09-12 Reblooming, symptoms, pests and recovery.

13-17 Seasonal care, other orchids, a checklist and sources.

Rule number one: check the plant and the mix before reaching for water.



Know your plant



Check the roots



Water with care

Find the right spot

Steady conditions and enough light create the foundation for growth and future flowers.

EAST OR WEST

A bright windowsill with gentle light is often a good place to start.

SOUTH

In summer, move the plant away from the glass or use a sheer curtain to soften strong sun.

How much light?

Phalaenopsis likes bright, indirect light. Strong summer sun, especially around midday, can scorch its leaves. In winter, move the plant to a brighter spot. Window direction is only a starting point: trees, buildings and curtains also change the amount of light.

A plant in a dark spot may grow leaves but struggle to flower. If you do not have a bright window, consider a plant grow light.

Comfortable temperatures

Day: around 20-25°C / 68-77°F is a comfortable range.

Night: around 16-19°C / 61-66°F. Keep the plant away from open windows in cold weather.

Avoid: cold glass, draughts, hot air from radiators and sudden temperature changes.

A warning sign

A pale, dry or bleached patch after strong sunlight may be sunburn. Damaged tissue will not turn green again.



Bright light



Shade from sun



Stable conditions

Water without guessing

Check inside the pot first. Water when the mix is nearly dry, without allowing the roots to dry out completely.

Look at three clues together

01 ROOTS

Silvery, pale roots can suggest watering is approaching. Green roots are usually moist.

02 MIX

Check moisture deeper in the pot. Moss and fine mixes dry differently from coarse bark.

03 POT

Lift it after watering and before the next check. A lighter pot usually holds less water.

How to water, step by step

1. Take the nursery pot out of its decorative cover. Use lukewarm water with a low mineral content.

2. Slowly run water through the bark, or stand just the inner pot in a bowl of water.

3. Let excess water drain completely. Empty the decorative pot and saucer.

4. Do not leave water in the crown or leaf joints. Gently blot it dry if water collects there.

In many homes, checking weekly is convenient, but it is not a fixed watering schedule. Drying time depends on temperature, light, pot size and the growing mix.

Never leave the pot standing in water.



Observe



Water



Drain

Water, humidity and roots

Healthy roots matter more than the number of flowers on a newly purchased plant.

What water should you use?

Use lukewarm water that is not excessively hard. The RHS recommends rainwater where available; if your tap water is hard, appropriately purified water is an option. Water from a sodium-based ion-exchange softener is not a good choice for regular watering.

You do not need to use ice cubes. Horticultural sources recommend room-temperature or lukewarm water. Do not rely on the colour of a single root to judge the moisture of the whole pot.

Reading the roots

HEALTHY

Usually firm and silvery or green. Roots growing in the dark mix may be paler.

DEAD OR ROTTING

Hollow, mushy or easily falling apart. Brown colour alone does not prove a root is rotten.

Aerial roots and humidity

Roots growing outside the pot are normal. Do not force them into the pot or cut them simply because they are visible. Wipe dusty leaves gently with a damp cloth.

Daily misting is not essential. In dry air, a humidifier or a tray of damp pebbles may help, provided the base of the pot sits above the water. Gentle air movement is helpful too.



Firm roots



Lukewarm water



Dry crown

Feed gently

Fertiliser supports growth, but it cannot replace light, healthy roots and appropriate watering.

A simple, cautious approach

Choose an orchid fertiliser and follow the dilution and directions on its label.

During active growth you can follow the University of Maryland approach: feed every third or fourth watering.

During a dark winter reduce or pause feeding, especially when the plant is barely growing.

From time to time water with plain water to flush accumulated salts from the mix. Let it drain completely.

Be cautious with miracle remedies

Banana peels, coffee grounds, milk and sugar water are not necessary. Their concentration and composition are unpredictable, and organic residues may make the growing mix less hygienic.

When should you pause feeding?

If the roots are rotting, the mix remains wet or the plant is seriously weakened, address that issue first. Too much fertiliser can damage roots. White deposits on the pot or bark can be a sign of mineral build-up, although they need to be assessed in context.

More fertiliser does not automatically mean more flowers.



Water



Feed lightly



Flush the mix

Repotting, step by step

Usually every 1-2 years, or sooner if the bark has broken down, drains poorly or roots are rotting.

Gather your supplies

You will need fresh bark-based mix for epiphytic orchids, a pot with drainage holes, clean scissors and water. A clear pot makes roots easier to observe, but is not essential. Do not use dense, ordinary potting soil.

What to do

1. Remove the plant. If roots are stuck to the pot, moisten them and gently loosen them.

2. Remove old mix. Carefully clear the spaces between the roots.

3. Check the roots. With clean scissors, trim only clearly dead, hollow or rotten portions. Keep firm roots, including aerial roots.

4. Choose a pot. It should accommodate the roots without excessive extra space; an oversized pot stays wet longer.

5. Add bark. Place the plant at its previous height. Keep the crown above the mix and gently fill around the roots.

6. Water and drain. Water to help the mix settle, then adjust future watering to how quickly it dries.

When is best?

Repot when new growth begins and root tips are active. If there is significant rot, do not wait only for flowering to end.



Healthy roots



Fresh bark



Drainage holes

After the flowers fade

Falling flowers are a natural part of the cycle. The orchid is still alive and needs care.

BROWN, DRY SPIKE

Cut the dry spike at its base with clean scissors, taking care not to damage the leaves.

GREEN SPIKE

You can leave it and observe, or cut above a healthy node. It may branch and flower again, but this is not guaranteed.

How to trim a green spike

Find a node: a small bump along the spike. With clean scissors, cut a little above a healthy node. You can also leave the spike uncut. Different orchids respond differently.

If you remove the entire green spike at its base, the plant will need to produce a new one, which may take longer. Do not cut leaves or roots simply because flowers have fallen.

What happens next?

Light and water: keep the plant in bright, indirect light and water according to the mix.

Time: a new leaf or root is a positive sign. Reblooming may take time.

Recovery: give a weakened plant time to rebuild its roots and leaves.

The end of flowering is the start of another growing cycle.



Green spike



Observe



Light

Encouraging new blooms

Start with a healthy plant. No method can guarantee flowers or a particular flowering date.

Four things to check

1. Light Too little light is a common reason an orchid does not flower. Move it to a brighter place, away from harsh sun.

2. Roots Check that they are firm and the mix is not staying wet for too long. Rotten roots limit water uptake.

3. Temperature For a healthy Phalaenopsis, gently cooler conditions can help initiate a spike. The RHS suggests a place about 5°C / 9°F cooler for roughly a month.

4. Time and maturity The plant needs resources and time. Not every orchid flowers on the same schedule.

Cooler, but not cold

For a typical indoor Phalaenopsis, aim for around 16-19°C / 61-66°F at night. Avoid cold draughts, cold window glass and sudden temperature drops.

Are buds yellowing and dropping?

There are several possible causes: a change in conditions, cold, draughts, root problems, insufficient light or ethylene from ripening fruit. Check the situation before increasing water or fertiliser.



Light



Healthy roots



New spike

What is your plant telling you?

One symptom can have several causes. Look at the leaves, roots and mix together.

Wrinkled, limp leaves

The plant is not taking up enough water. This can result from a dry mix or from losing roots after overwatering. Check the roots before watering.

One older leaf turns yellow

This may be natural ageing, especially if the rest of the plant is growing well. Watch how quickly the change progresses.

Several leaves turn yellow

Check the mix and roots, as well as light and temperature. Colour alone is not enough for a certain diagnosis.

A brown or pale dry patch

This can suggest sunburn. Move the plant away from intense sun and watch whether the patch spreads.

Soft or hollow roots

These may be dead or rotten. Check drainage, remove dead portions and replace the mix if needed.

White deposits on bark or pot

These may be mineral or fertiliser salts. Flush the mix with water; if the bark has broken down, consider repotting.

Pests and disease

Inspect leaf undersides, leaf bases, buds and other hard-to-see places.

White cottony clusters may be mealybugs. Look closely in leaf joints and around the base.

Small, attached bumps may be scale insects. Check leaf undersides and areas close to the veins.

Tiny insects on buds may be aphids. Look for sticky residue and distorted new growth.

Silvery marks, fine dots or webbing have several possible causes, including pests. Examine the plant in good light, ideally with a magnifying glass.

First steps

Isolate the plant from others. If there are only a few pests, remove them carefully by hand and check the plant again, including hidden areas. Clean tools before using them on another plant.

If the problem persists, choose a product authorised where you live for the specific pest and ornamental plants. Follow the current label exactly. Avoid spraying flowers and follow the product directions for testing sensitivity.

A soft, darkening crown

This may indicate serious rot. Isolate the plant, remove standing water and improve conditions. If the damage spreads quickly, consult a plant specialist.



Inspect



Isolate



Check again

A simple recovery plan

Begin by identifying the cause. Avoid trying every home remedy at once.

A. The mix has been overwatered

1. Remove the inner pot from its cover, empty any standing water and check the drainage holes.

2. If the bark stays wet, has broken down or smells rotten, remove the plant and examine the roots.

3. Trim only clearly dead roots. Repot in fresh, airy orchid mix and retain living roots.

4. Provide bright, indirect light. Adjust future watering to the remaining roots and how quickly the mix dries.

B. The plant is too dry

If the mix is dry, the pot is light and the roots are still firm, water thoroughly and allow excess water to drain. Do not try to make up for weeks of dryness by leaving the plant permanently in water. Leaves may take time to regain firmness.

C. Few living roots remain

Keep conditions clean, airy and lightly moist without flooding the crown. Pause fertiliser and watch for new root tips. Recovery can take months, and severe rot is not always reversible.

Do not judge recovery after one day. Watch for new growth.



Inspect



Refresh the mix



Watch for growth

A year with your orchid

Seasons change the conditions inside your home. These are prompts for observation, not a rigid calendar.

SPRING

More light often brings active growth. Check the mix, consider repotting when roots are active and resume light feeding.

SUMMER

Protect the plant from harsh sun and overheating. Bark may dry faster. Water according to actual moisture.

AUTUMN

As days shorten, provide a bright place. Gently cooler nights may help initiate a spike. Avoid cold draughts.

WINTER

Watch for cold window glass and dry heat from radiators. The mix may dry more slowly; reduce feeding during slow growth.

A routine that is easy to keep

Every few days or once a week, look over the plant and check pot weight and moisture inside. Water only when it needs it. From time to time, examine leaf undersides and gently remove dust.

Remember

An orchid may grow or flower outside the expected season. Its actual condition matters more than the month on a calendar.

Not every orchid is the same

Find the name on the label. This overview is a starting point, not a substitute for advice for your particular plant.

PHALAENOPSIS

Warm-growing; bright, indirect light and an airy mix. Water when the mix is nearly dry. This is the focus of this guide.

DENDROBIUM

A diverse group. Nobile-type hybrids often prefer cooler conditions than warm-growing D. phalaenopsis types.

CYMBIDIUM

Enjoys good light. For many varieties, a difference between day and night temperatures in late summer helps initiate flowers.

ONCIDIUM

There are warm- and cool-growing groups. Many have pseudobulbs. Temperature and watering depend on the specific group.

Do not transfer every rule

Cooling, rest periods, pruning and watering routines that suit one orchid may harm another. Identify the plant before changing its conditions.

Common questions

Based on the sources listed at the end of this guide.

Must I water every seven days?

No. A weekly check is useful, but the actual timing depends on the mix and conditions.

Do all roots need to be inside the pot?

No. Aerial roots are natural; healthy ones do not need to be removed or forced into the pot.

Will trimming a spike guarantee new flowers?

No. Flowers may appear on a side branch or a new spike, but pruning is no guarantee.

Can misting replace watering?

No. Brief misting generally does not supply enough water to the roots inside the pot.

Is Phalaenopsis safe around cats and dogs?

The ASPCA lists Phalaenopsis as non-toxic to cats and dogs. This does not mean pets should eat it; assess fertilisers and pest treatments separately.

Does a yellow leaf always mean disease?

No. The oldest leaf may be ageing naturally. Several yellowing leaves call for a check of the roots and conditions.



Learn the facts



Observe



Take your time

Your quick checklist

Save this page and return to it whenever you need a simple starting point.

- [ ] Bright, indirect light and protection from harsh sun.
- [ ] Comfortable indoor temperatures; no cold draughts or hot radiator air.
- [ ] Check moisture inside the pot before each watering.
- [ ] Use lukewarm water and let the pot drain completely.
- [ ] Keep the crown dry; leave no standing water in the cover pot.
- [ ] Use an airy bark mix and a pot with drainage holes.
- [ ] Feed moderately, following the product label.
- [ ] Check leaves, roots and hidden areas for pests.
- [ ] Replace broken-down mix, usually every 1-2 years.
- [ ] Be patient after flowering and watch for new growth.

The thought to keep

There is no single perfect watering day or secret to flowers. The best care combines light, healthy roots, the right amount of water and patient observation.



Light



Water



Patience

Sources and further reading

Page footers refer to the numbered sources below. Links open the original English-language resources.

1. Royal Horticultural Society: How to grow Phalaenopsis
   https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/phalaenopsis/growing-guide
2. American Orchid Society: Phalaenopsis Culture Sheet
   https://www.aos.org/orchid-care/care-sheets/phalaenopsis-culture-sheet
3. University of Maryland Extension: Care of Phalaenopsis Orchids
   https://extension.umd.edu/resource/care-phalaenopsis-orchids-moth-orchids
4. RHS: Phalaenopsis plant details
   https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/12596/phalaenopsis/details
5. RHS: Growing Phalaenopsis orchids
   https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/articles/misc/growing-phalaenopsis-orchids
6. American Orchid Society: Bud Blast
   https://www.aos.org/orchid-care/orchid-pests-and-diseases/bud-blast
7. RHS: Indoor plants, sap-feeding insects
   https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/indoor-plants-sap-feeding-insects
8. University of Maryland Extension: Watering Indoor Plants
   https://extension.umd.edu/resource/watering-indoor-plants
9. University of Maryland Extension: Mineral and Fertilizer Salt Deposits
   https://extension.umd.edu/resource/mineral-and-fertilizer-salt-deposits-indoor-plants
10. RHS: Phalaenopsis windowsill trial
    https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards/plant-trial-results/phalaenopsis
11. University of Maryland Extension: Diagnose Indoor Plant Problems
    https://extension.umd.edu/resource/diagnose-indoor-plant-problems
12. RHS: How to grow Dendrobium
    https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/dendrobium/how-to-grow-dendrobium
13. RHS: How to grow Cymbidium
    https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/cymbidium-orchids/how-to-grow-cymbidium-orchids
14. RHS: Warm-growing Oncidium
    https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/oncidium-orchids/warm/growing-guide
15. ASPCA: Phalaenopsis Orchid
    https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/aspca-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants/phalaenopsis-orchid

Sources accessed 2 November 2026. This guide summarises practical recommendations; it is not a complete guide to every orchid species. The cover image is AI-generated and decorative.