



Phalaenopsis

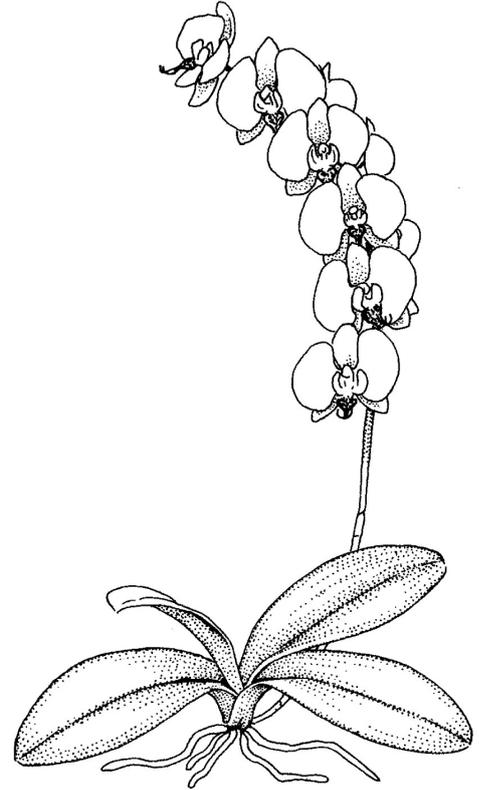
Pronounced: Fail-eh-NOP-sis

Phalaenopsis, or the moth orchid, is perhaps the best orchid for growing in the home; it is also a favorite with greenhouse growers. Well-grown plants can flower often, sometimes with a few flowers throughout the year; though the main flowering period is late winter into spring.

Average home temperatures and conditions are usually sufficient for growth. Flower stems on certain hybrids can be forced to re-bloom by cutting the tip off after the initial flowering. Only healthy plants can be induced to flower repeatedly. Care for *Doritis*, and *Doritaenopsis* orchids in the same manner as you would for *Phalaenopsis*.

Light

Light is easy to provide for Phalaenopsis. This orchid grows easily in a bright window, with little or no sun. An east window is ideal in the home; shaded south or west windows are acceptable. In overcast northern winter climates, a full south exposure may be needed. Artificial lighting can easily be provided. Fluorescent tubes in one fixture supplemented by incandescent bulbs are placed 6 to 12 inches above the leaves, 12 to 16 hours a day, following natural day length. In a greenhouse, shade must be given, it is recommended that plants receive 70 to 85 percent shade. No shadow should be seen if you hold your hand one foot above the plant's leaves.



Temperatures

For Phalaenopsis, temperatures should usually be above 16 C at night, and range between 24 and 29 C or more during the day. Although higher temperatures force faster vegetative growth, higher humidity and air movement must accompany higher temperatures, the recommended maximum being 32 to 35 C. Night temperatures of 13 C are desirable for several weeks in the autumn to initiate flower spikes. Fluctuating temperatures can cause flower bud drop on plants with buds ready to open.

Water

It is especially critical for Phalaenopsis to receive proper watering, because they have no major water-storage organs, other than their leaves. Phalaenopsis must never completely dry out. Plants should be thoroughly watered, and not watered again until nearly dry. In the heat of summer in a dry climate, this may be every other day; in the winter in a cool northern greenhouse, it may be every 10 days. To prevent rot, water your orchid only in the morning, so that the leaves are dry by nightfall.

Humidity

A relatively high humidity is important for Phalaenopsis plants, the recommended humidity being between 50 and 80 percent. In humid climates, as in greenhouses, it is very important that the humid air be moving. Leaves should dry as soon as possible after watering, always by nightfall. In the home, set the plants on trays of gravel, partially filled with water, so that the bottom of the pot never sits in water.

Fertilizing

Fertilize on a regular schedule, especially if the weather is warm, as this is when your orchids are growing the most. Twice-a-month applications of high-nitrogen fertilizer (such as 30-10-10) are appropriate where bark-based media are used. Otherwise, a balanced fertilizer is best. When flowering is desired, a high-phosphorus fertilizer (such as 15-30-15) can be applied to promote blooming. Some growers apply fertilizer at one-quarter strength with every watering; this is best for warm, humid conditions. When cooler, or under overcast conditions, fertilizer should be applied twice per month at a weaker strength.

Potting

Re-potting is best done in the spring, immediately after flowering. Phalaenopsis plants must be potted in a porous mix. Potting is usually done every one to three years. Mature plants can grow in the same container until the potting medium starts to decompose, usually in about two years' time. Root rot occurs if plants are left in a soggy medium. Seedlings usually grow fast enough to need repotting yearly and should be repotted in a fine-grade medium. Mature plants are potted in a medium-grade mix. To repot, remove all the old medium from the roots, trim soft rotted roots, and spread the remaining roots over a handful of medium in the bottom of a new pot. Fill the rest of the pot with medium, working it among the roots, so that the junction of the roots and the stem is at the top of the medium.

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