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## Phalaenopsis

Fayl-eh-nop-siss

Phalaenopsis, the moth orchid, is perhaps the best orchid for growing in the home, and is also a favorite with greenhouse growers. Well-grown plants can flower often, sometimes with a few flowers throughout the year, though the main season is late winter into spring. Average home temperatures and conditions are usually sufficient. Flower stems on certain hybrids can be forced to rebloom by cutting the tip off after the initial flowering. Only healthy plants should be induced to flower repeatedly.

**Light** is easy to provide for phalaenopsis. They grow 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. Four fluorescent tubes in one fixture supplemented by incandescent bulbs are placed 6-12" above the leaves, 12-16 hours a day, following natural day length.

**Temperature** for phalaenopsis should usually be above 60 F and 75-85 F 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 90-95 F. Night temperatures to 55 F are desirable for several weeks in the autumn to initiate flower spikes. Fluctuating temperatures can cause bud drop on plants with buds ready to open.

**Water** is especially critical for phalaenopsis. Because they have no major water-storage organs other than their leaves, they 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. Water only in the morning, so that the leaves dry by nightfall, to prevent rot.

**Fertilize** on a regular schedule, especially if the weather is warm, when the plants are most often growing. Twice-a-month applications of high-nitrogen fertilizer (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 (10-30-20) 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 weak strength.

**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 two years. Root rot occurs if plants are left in a soggy medium. Mature plants are potted in a medium-grade mix. To repot, remove the entire 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.