

Care of Phalaenopsis Orchids

The plant you received is a Phalaenopsis (fail-uh-**nop**'-sis) orchid, also known as the “moth” orchid. When they were first discovered in the jungle, the person who found them saw a bloom spike from a distance and thought it looked like a swarm of moths. They are also often referred to simply as “phals” (pronounced fail).

What they need to survive and re-bloom:

Light

- ✓ This is a good houseplant because its light requirements are low. It will do well near an east or south window where it can get bright, indirect light. One of the main reasons that orchids don't re-bloom is lack of light. If leaves are very dark green, it's not getting enough light. The leaves should be a light green.

Water/Fertilizing

- ✓ **This orchid is planted in sphagnum moss which retains a lot of water for a long time:**

Over watering kills more orchids than anything else. If it's in a plastic sleeve, placed in a decorative pot, lift the plant out of the decorative pot periodically, and poke a finger in the hole in the bottom of the plastic sleeve. **IF IT FEELS DAMP, DO NOT WATER.** To water when needed, set it in a container of water to the rim of the pot to soak for 10 minutes or so until it gets good and wet. Do not put it outside where it will be rained on. Water standing in the crown of the plant will cause rot. **FORGET** the ice cube method of watering. This is a tropical plant. It does not like cold.

If it's in a clear plastic pot without a hole in the bottom or in a pot that's not clear, feel the weight of the pot. If the pot is heavy, don't water. Wait until it gets lighter. Observe the roots; if they are white and dry looking, water until the roots turn green.

Orchids like to get wet and then dry off completely before being watered again. Continue to water your plant as instructed as long as it is in sphagnum moss. As soon as all the blooms are gone, cut the old stem off and, repot the plant in a potting medium that is largely inorganic (i.e. charcoal, perlite, bark mix), not dirt or potting soil. Special orchid potting mixes are available at garden centers. When not in sphagnum moss, it will need weekly watering, as regular mixes do not hold water like the moss does. To re-pot, clean off all the old moss, cut off dead roots, and re-pot in a **plastic** pot of the same size or the next size up. Do not over pot.

New leaves should start growing at the top of the plant, and they grow slowly, usually 2 per year. The usual blooming season for Phals is late winter and early spring. New bloom spikes come from between the leaves. Since this plant was “forced” to flower off season, it may skip a season before blooming again, but it could bloom on schedule. It blooms once a year, but the blooms usually last 2 to 3 months, sometimes longer. Phals like to put out aerial roots that stick up out of the pot. Don't worry about them. When you water the plant, water them too till they turn green.

You may fertilize every time you water. Use a 20-20-20 fertilizer at half strength. Or use a time release fertilizer which comes in pellet form. Nutricote is best. It can be ordered from Amazon.com or Home Depot's Dynamite brand is the same thing.

Humidity/Air

Orchids like high humidity and good air movement. Indoors, heaters and air conditioners lower humidity levels. Place plant on a tray of rocks/pebbles that are covered with water, but do not let the pot sit in the water. Keep it above the water on top of the rocks. Humidity trays are available at garden centers or online. Air movement can be provided with a small fan.

In fall, when night temperatures fall to 50° to 55°, place it outside in a bright but sheltered location for a couple of weeks. Keep it out of the rain. The temperature drop seems to help trigger the next bloom cycle. They don't like to be much colder than 50° though.