

A Breathtaking Bloom: The Moth Orchid

How to Grow Moth Orchids Indoors this Winter

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While they may not be your traditional holiday bloom, Phalaenopsis, or moth orchids, make a beautiful house plant, regardless of the season. The moth orchid is renowned for its easy care and beautiful flowers, which last for a very long time and return year after year.



Offering lavish sprays of pink, white, yellow, and purple, spotted and striped flowers, moth orchids are the perfect way to add unexpected colour to your home during the holiday season and winter months. However, despite the development of dazzling new colours, white Phalaenopsis continue to command attention, and will work easily with the Christmas theme in your home. They are quite simply the most stunning plant to give someone special and to have in your home during the holiday season.

How to care for your moth orchid

There has always been a mystique surrounding orchids because of their tropical origins, the frenzied quest in the early New World to find this unusual flower, and ultimately, their beauty. This mystique has induced a belief that they are difficult to grow and care for. Fortunately, this is just a myth! Most orchids are not difficult to grow and are similar to African violets, Boston Ferns, and other house plants in their care. Here are some guidelines to keep an orchid healthy and happy.

Light and Temperature

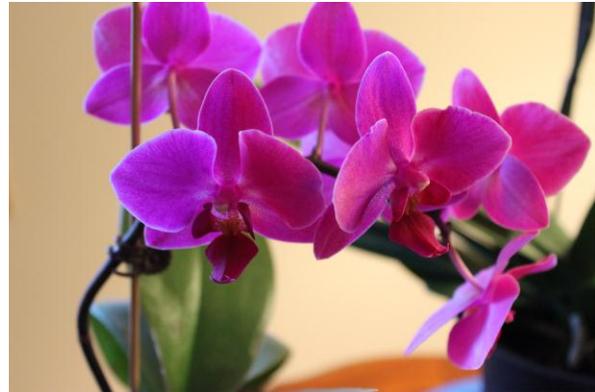
Orchids enjoy a spot near a bright window. An east window is best. South and west facing windows are fine but should be shaded with curtains or by trees to protect from the direct scorching sunlight. Phalaenopsis do best in temperatures between 18° to 27°C, optimally with day temperatures between 22° and 27° and 18° at night. Cooler night time temperatures in the fall encourage flower spike initiation.

Watering

Orchid potting medium should be kept evenly moist. Water regularly once every week or two weeks depending on the potting medium and location in your home. Finger-test the medium for moisture then make a mental note of the weight of the pot. After that, the weight of the pot can indicate water requirement. Take care not to let water settle in the crown of the plant where the new leaves come from as it can cause rot.

Humidity

Orchids prefer 50-60% humidity year-round. Typically this is higher than most homes or offices. Humidity can easily be increased by placing the orchid pot on a shallow tray filled with pebbles and water. Be sure the plant roots are not sitting in the water.



Fertilizer

You can encourage your orchid to bloom again by providing the nutrients it needs! During the active growing period, spring and summer months, use a fertilizer with equal proportions of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), and potash (K) such as 20-20-20 or 14-14-14. In the autumn, switch to a bloom-boosting fertilizer such as 10-30-20. Apply fertilizer with every second watering at $\frac{1}{4}$ the recommended rate. Coupled with cooler nights, this induces plants to set buds and flower.

Medium and Repotting

In their natural setting, orchids grow on trees. Pre-packaged orchid medium is created to give a similar foundation. A mix of fir bark, horticulture charcoal, and natural minerals, provides pore spaces that retain moisture, oxygen, and nutrients, and consistent aeration for the roots. Alternatively, sphagnum moss with styrofoam chips or stones placed in the bottom of the pot for drainage is now the media of choice for many growers. Phalaenopsis need to be re-potted once a year for several reasons; it may have outgrown the pot, the medium has broken down and is no longer providing the conditions necessary for growth, and the roots may have rotted. Remove the plant from the pot and let the medium fall away from the roots. Carefully trim away the rotted or dead roots. Select a pot that is just larger than the root ball. If using bark mix, soak it overnight. Place the ball in the pot and pour the fresh media in and around the roots. If using moss, place Styrofoam chips or stones in the bottom of the pot, then pack moss around the root ball and insert into the pot. Resume your normal watering and fertilizer schedule.

