

## Andy's Orchids Cultural Tips

This is a brief summary of orchid culture with the beginner in mind.

**Temperature:** We identify the country or region of origin for each plant. This gives some local flavor as well as a guide to the plant's temperature needs. If your orchid originates from equatorial areas it experiences relatively constant temperatures; whether they live in colder mountains or in tropical jungles, there is little variability in temperature year-round. The closer you get to the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn the broader the seasonal temperature fluctuations in its natural habitat. As a grower we recommend that you choose plants that easily grow in the environment you are able to create and are willing to maintain. If you are a beginner or don't have a controlled environment and grow indoors/outdoors according to the season, pick plants with a broader temperature range. Floridians and other Gulf residents should lean towards tropical warmer growers and only consider cool growers for an air-conditioned environment. Residents of the North do well with intermediate growers and can manage warm growing plants if they help them through the winter with supplemental warmth and light. It is important to increase watering when you bring your plants indoors.

**Light:** The terms "Shaded", "Bright", and "Full-Sun", are self-explanatory. You may have to experiment a bit with a plant's location to get the right light and temperature combination. Most bright growing plants can handle early morning or late afternoon direct sunlight. The cooler your growing area, the more intense light your plants can handle without damage. Keep in mind those shady-growers still require a well-lit environment. A healthy-looking plant that refuses to bloom is generally getting too little light (assuming water and temperature are adequate). When growing under full sun remember that orchids like air movement and breezes, which keep their leaves cool. Indoors, don't hesitate to supplement with growing lights, as your plants will undoubtedly reward you for them. Just remember the lights can reduce the humidity levels in your growing area.

**Watering:** I cannot say too much about water. Water quality, frequency and duration are all vitally important in raising healthy robust orchids. Water quality: Orchids, especially those from high-elevations, are easily damaged by mineral salts (which are almost non-existent in their natural habitat). Always use good quality, clean water: rainwater is best followed by "good" tap water (i.e., water that is low in dissolved minerals and salts). Other options include water purified by reverse osmosis, de-ionization, or distillation. If you must use "hard water" (water high in dissolved minerals), drench the plant thoroughly to break down mineral buildups. Every time you water or mist with hard water, a residue of dissolved salts is left behind which will become a white, chalky deposit on the pot, mount, or surface of the mix; in time, this can kill growing root tips and burn leaves. Never ever use softened water to water orchids: it is high in sodium and will kill plants.

**Water frequency:** It is almost impossible to over-water a mounted orchid, but easy to over-water one in a pot. Pay close attention to the texture and shape of the roots, leaves, and pseudo bulbs to gauge how often your plants need water. In between watering you can spray them occasionally to provide dew or even better get a misting system, but remember to only use good water when misting. Also be careful not to use water that is too chilly, it could shock your plants. If you grow anywhere indoors: under lights, in an air-conditioned office or on your kitchen windowsill, your watering frequency must increase to compensate for lower indoor humidity. Grouping plants together, placing your potted orchids on trays filled with gravel and water improves humidity, and grouped mounted plants in particular add to this effect.

**Water duration:** Give your plant's roots a chance to absorb the water you give them. A quick splash on a warm summer day will evaporate before the roots can soak up what they need. Remember when it rains in the tropics, it rains in bucketfuls, so treat your plants to a good rainstorm. Water in the late afternoon or evenings during warm months and in the winter switch to a morning schedule. When you water, soak the plant completely (keep flowers dry to make them last longer). The root-ball in both potted and mounted plants needs to get thoroughly wet, and don't forget to fertilize at V4 strength at least once a month. Some plants require a rest period (usually in the winter) during which watering is reduced or even suspended completely. Our plant tags identify each plant with such a requirement.

**Air Movement:** All plants grow better with a slight breeze. This helps them cool-off and the movement itself strengthens the plant and builds heartier flower spikes. While wintering plants indoors, place a small fan nearby.