

Cynthia's Orchid FAQ Sheet

The following represents some of the most frequently asked questions people ask Cynthia about their orchids. Hopefully this will help you on your journey to orchid growing success!

How often should I water my orchid?

The potting mix is the single greatest factor that determines frequency of watering. B.B. Barns sells a bark based substrate for potting orchids. Generally this mix requires weekly watering. Many growers use sphagnum moss and soil based substrates, and these tend to dry out more slowly. Check orchids potted in these media by lifting the pot. If the pot is lighter than normal, water it thoroughly.

What kind of light will be best for my orchid?

Contrary to popular belief, some orchids can take up to four hours of direct sun. Strappy leaved orchids such as Oncidium and Dendrobium benefit from these higher light levels. Phalaenopsis and Paphiopedilum orchids, however, need no direct light. Their more tender leaves would burn in direct sun. Bright, but filtered light is key for these popular orchids.

What is the best potting mix?

Cynthia believes that for most orchids, the bark mix is best. This light substrate allows plenty of air contact with the roots, a benefit for most orchids. If the roots have been traumatized, however, it may be worthwhile to use a mix that does not dry out as quickly, particularly sphagnum moss.

When should I repot my orchid?

The vast majority of orchids enjoy being pot-bound, and can stay in the same pot for one to two years. When the planting mix breaks down, however, it is definitely time to repot. It is good to repot when the plant is in active growth. Pre-soak your planting medium, and remember that the roots should be snug after repotting.

How frequently should I fertilize, and with what?

The rule of thumb for fertilizing orchids is "weakly, weekly." This means a low dilution of water soluble fertilizer every week. Some growers prefer lighter feedings, opting for every other week. During the spring and summer it is best to use growth fertilizers with more nitrogen. During late summer and fall a bloom fertilizer with higher levels of phosphorus is best. Regardless of the time year, water the orchids thoroughly to prime them before fertilizing. This will make the roots more receptive to nutrient absorption.

Why won't my orchid re-bloom?

Most orchids need a 20 degree Fahrenheit difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures to initiate blooming. You can provide this for your orchids by leaving them outside in a protected area over summer, then bringing them in after the temperatures start to fluctuate prior to fall.