

TRANSPORTING BLOOMING ORCHIDS

Safe Methods for Moving Flowering Orchids to Keep Them in Prime Shape

By Susan Jones

During this time of the year, unpredictable and often inhospitable winter weather makes transporting flowering orchids a tricky matter. A shock of cold, dry air can quickly damage and even blast an orchid bud or bloom, a particularly heartbreaking event if one is on the way to have the flower judged. When carrying your flowering plant to a show, home from a nursery, to Judging or even to give as a holiday gift, taking a little bit of precaution against potential cold damage can prevent a lot of disappointment later on.

An orchid's flowers and buds, as the most vulnerable parts of the plant, are easily damaged by environmental stress. Some of the more cold-sensitive varieties may even drop leaves if the exposure and shock is of sufficient severity. Phalaenopsis and vandaceous orchids (the former neofinetias are a bit hardier than most, but their blooms are still sensitive) are among the least tolerant of chills. Other orchids that are most often affected include those with flowers of more delicate substance. The thicker, heavier and waxier an orchid's floral tissues are, the more resistant to cold damage they will be.

Long-time orchid grower, Connecticut Orchid Society member and one of the technical editors of Orchids magazine, Ann Jesup provided the following savvy ideas for ways to minimize disaster enroute to an orchid society meeting, show or Judging at a presentation to the Society.

TIPS FROM A PRO

Start with a good quantity of packing materials, she advises. Have on hand a variety of boxes of different sizes, including some insulated styrofoam boxes to shelter your plants from

inclement weather. Padding is also important. She suggests waxed floss paper (also known as "spaghetti"), shredded paper, polyester batting and styrofoam peanuts as useful materials. For protection against brief exposure to the elements, the plastic bags in which newspapers are delivered make an ideal sleeve to slip over a smaller plant. Dry-cleaning bags supported by wire hoops can help protect larger plants or those with tall inflorescences from freezing or drying out in winter weather. Plastic storage containers of various sizes and shapes are useful. They are not effective at insulating plants, but do provide excellent shorter term protection against potentially damaging chills. When used in conjunction with the packing materials mentioned above, they can be an excellent light weight winter carrying case for bringing blooming orchids safely to and from their destination.

Newspaper is an effective, easily available and inexpensive insulation material. If plants must remain in an unheated area for any length of time during inclement weather, a cardboard box lined with newspaper will help retain heat around the plant. Foam packing peanuts may be added to stabilize and protect the plant in the box, but provide little in the way of insulation or heat retention.

INSULATING PLANT

For extreme situations in which prolonged exposure is anticipated, a heat pack can be placed under protective insulation in the bottom of the box. Disposable chemical heat packs are available in different lengths of effectiveness — the most commonly available last six to eight hours, but other durations are

available. They can be ordered online (enter “disposable heat packs” into a search engine to find a vendor). Some orchid vendors who use them for shipping may also be persuaded to sell some of their stock.

Another consideration is staking your plant’s inflorescences. This cannot only improve the overall appearance of the blooms, but will also help keep the spike and flowers stationary and less susceptible to injury during transportation. The proper time to stake an inflorescence is when the flowers are beginning to develop. This helps ensure that the buds are oriented properly once they open. For the sake of aesthetics, Jesup suggests attempting to keep the stake unobtrusive. Placing the thinnest stake possible as close to the foliage as is practical helps to avoid distracting attention from the blooms themselves.

Finally, when the temperature is low, warm up your vehicle in advance of transporting blooming orchids to minimize the length of time your plants will have to endure the chill temperatures. Plan your trips so the plants will spend the shortest possible time in transit, and never leave orchids sitting in a hot or cold car.

Susan Jones was editor of the Awards Quarterly. Originally published in ORCHIDS Magazine, December 2013. Reprinted by permission