

# NYBG

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## Orchid FAQs: Home



*Phalaenopsis* Destiny; photo by Hayden Lees

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions about growing orchids.

## What type of potting medium should I use?

Orchids are either naturally epiphytic (growing on other plants such as trees; sometimes called "air plants") or terrestrial (growing from the ground). When growing orchids at home, it's important to try to mimic their natural environment. Terrestrial orchids usually grow in the loose leaf litter that covers the rain forest floor, while epiphytic orchids usually have nothing at all around their roots.

Both types of orchids require good drainage and good root aeration to grow. Common orchid mixes are composed of fir bark, tree fern fiber, sphagnum moss, perlite, and charcoal. Epiphytic orchids that need to dry out between watering should be planted in coarse mixes, while terrestrials and epiphytes that naturally thrive in moist environments prefer medium to fine mixes. For the beginner, it's best to experiment with ready-made orchid mixes, found at any garden center, rather than to make your own.

## How do I water my orchid, and how often?

Orchids generally need to be watered every 4 to 10 days, depending on the orchid, the home environment, and the time of year. Use tepid water and avoid splashing water on the flowers; they may spot. The best way to water an orchid potted in sphagnum moss is to take it to your kitchen sink and run water through the potting mix until it flows freely through the drainage holes.

Many orchids are potted in a bark mixture. Bark initially repels water before it becomes saturated, so it is important to water until the bark is saturated. If your orchid is not getting properly hydrated, the easiest way to water an orchid potted in bark mix is to soak the pot in a large bowl or small basin full of water. Have the water level come up just below the lip of the pot, so that the bark mixture doesn't spill out. Soak for about 10 minutes to saturate. Allow the water to drain out completely; orchids like a good soak but don't tolerate sitting in water. Uneven watering will result in shallow or uneven root growth.

After you have watered your orchid, feel the weight of the container; it will be heavy. When the potting mixture dries out, the pot will be much lighter. You will eventually be able to gauge your watering schedule by monitoring the weight of your pot. If this sounds too complicated, simply stick a pencil two inches into the bark mixture. If the tip of the pencil stays dry, you need to water your orchid. It's better to under-water an orchid than to over-water it.

### Ask a Plant Expert

#### Contact Us

email

[plantinfo@nybg.org](mailto:plantinfo@nybg.org)

### Find a Plant at NYBG

#### Find a Plant at NYBG



- **NYBG Garden Navigator**

Use this resource to explore the NYBG grounds, including information about specific plants, bloom times, and garden features.

- **NYBG Garden Guides**

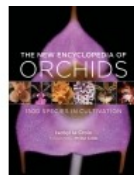
Guides from the Plant Information Office related to specific NYBG gardens, including their history, design, and current plantings.



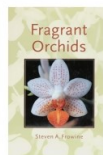
### Related Guides

- **Basic Orchid Care**
- **Fragrant Orchids**
- **The New York Botanical Garden in Myanmar: Orchids and Beyond**
- **Orchids: Potting and Dividing**
- **Popular Houseplant Profiles**
- **Tropical Houseplants**
- **Troubleshooting with Orchids**

### Books to Purchase at NYBG Shop in the Garden



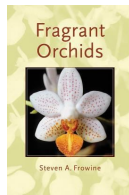
**The New Encyclopedia of Orchids**  
1,500 Species in Cultivation  
by Isobyl la Croix



**Fragrant Orchids**  
A Guide to Selecting, Growing, and Enjoying  
by Steven A. Frowine

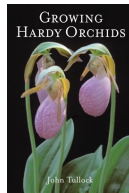


## Noteworthy Books on Orchid Care



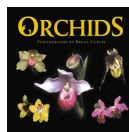
**Fragrant Orchids  
by Steven A.  
Frowine**

Call Number: QL  
66 .A1 F768 2005  
ISBN: 0881927392  
Publication Date:  
2005-09-07



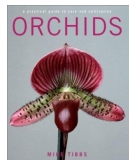
**Growing Hardy  
Orchids by John  
Tullock**

Call Number: QL  
66 .A1m T84 2005  
ISBN: 0881927155  
Publication Date:  
2005-07-14



**Orchids (2005) by  
Bruce Curtis**

Call Number: QL  
66 .A1 C87 2005  
ISBN:  
9780762424566  
Publication Date:  
2005-11-29



**Orchids (2007) by  
Mike Tibbs**

Call Number: QL  
66 .A1 T49 2007  
ISBN:  
9781883052591  
Publication Date:



### Orchid Societies



**American Orchid Society**



**Manhattan Orchid Society**



Long Island Orchid Society  
*...where members grow*

**Long Island Orchid Society**

### Useful Websites



**Orchid Pests and Diseases**



**Missouri Botanical Garden - Orchid Problems**



**Identify Your Orchid**



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NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN