

Home/Garden

Believe it or not, you can grow some orchids on your windowsill

Probably no flower is considered as exotic and luxurious as the orchid and yet it is possible to grow some members of this very large family as houseplants on the windowsill. The key to success is choosing a variety that will be happy in your household climate.

Orchids are divided into three temperature categories: cool growing that require nighttime lows of 50 degrees; intermediate that require 55-60 degree temperatures at night and warm growing that need lows of 65-70 degrees at night. They all require day time temperatures between 70 to 90 degrees. Too much sun or heat for a given plant will burn it and deplete its food supply while temperatures that are too cold will cause flowerless stems, and spots on leaves and blossoms.

All orchids need humidity between 50 and 80 per cent. Setting the potted

Pat Leuchtman
Between
The Rows



plants on a tray filled with pebbles and water and misting the plants daily will help. However, since humidity is crucial it's advisable to place one of the new small humidifiers near your plants. They need this dependable humidity — and you'll feel better for it during the dry winter months as well.

Cattleyas, oncidiums and phalaenopsis orchids all do well in the home. One of the reasons orchids make such exciting houseplants is that the plant is so long lived and

produces longlasting blooms. Cattleya blossoms (often used in corsages) can last as long as three or four weeks. A mature phalaenopsis can produce flower clusters two or three times a year and each spray will last a month or more.

Most orchids do not grow in soil; they grow on trunks and branches of trees with aerial roots, but they are not parasites. In cultivation they must be given a special potting mixture made of bark that will allow air and moisture to reach the roots.

The rooting medium for orchids drains quickly so they must be watered regularly, preferably in the morning so the foliage can be dry by evening. Lifting the pot to see how light it is will give you a better idea of when it's time to water. The top may feel dry while plenty of moisture is left below. Too much water-

ing will rot the roots.

Orchids are heavy feeders, though they require less during their resting periods. Since they do not get nourishment from potting soil, they must be fertilized with a 30-10-10 fertilizer. Always fertilize after the plant has been watered. Potting medium and fertilizer are readily available from any nursery that sells orchids.

Lighting requirements vary with the different genera. Cattleyas and oncidium need lots of light, but should be protected from full mid day sun between March and August. Phalaenopsis needs less light and will do well in an east window.

Orchids need to be repotted every year or two. Choose a time when the plant is just starting new shoots. Phalaenopsis orchids are monopodial and should be centered in the new pot, but most other or-

chids which can be grown as houseplants are sympodial and should be placed along the edge of the pot because new growth will appear horizontally and will require this room.

Eventually roots may appear outside the pot, but remember these are aerial roots; they don't indicate that the plant is potbound. Orchids begin to bloom when they are about five years old; blooming age plants can be expensive, but younger ones can be bought for the same price as other houseplants.

We don't need to emulate Rex Stout's famous detective Nero Wolfe who spent hours in the orchid greenhouse on top of the 35th Street brownstone. An orchid or two on the windowsill won't take much time and will give a lot of pleasure.

Fall is an ideal time to look at our houseplants and to see if we might

like to add something new and interesting. There is still time to order plants that may not be available locally and have them shipped through the mail without being damaged by severe weather. The American Orchid Society (6000 South Olive Ave, West Palm Beach, FL 33405) sells many books and booklets that will help the novice orchid gardener: .100 - Handbook on Orchid Culture, 92 pages, \$3.95; .203 - You Can Grow Orchids by Mary Noble, 128 pages, \$9.95; .208 - Orchids as Houseplants by Rebecca Northern, 148 pages, \$2.95. Add \$2.00 for mailing and handling.

Sources for Orchids (all catalogs \$1): City Gardens, 11850 Van Dyke Ave., Detroit, MI 48234-4191; Fox Orchids, 6615 W. Markham, Little Rock, AR 72205; Venamy, Inc., Mark Mead Road, Cross River, NY 10518.