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**February 17, 2012**

**Orchids are Easy... if you pick the right ones!**

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For those you whose interest is aroused by the thought of growing orchids, here are some details about the culture requirements of the two easiest orchids to grow: *Phalaenopsis* and *Oncidium*s. These two orchids are grower-friendly because they prefer the normal temperatures, humidity (with a little help) and light conditions in our New Hampshire homes.

The best orchid for beginners is the *Phalaenopsis* (fal-en-NOP-siss), also known as the "Moth Orchid." Phals enjoy a temperature range around 60 degrees Fahrenheit at night and up to 87 degrees during the day. For Phals to grow and flower well, place them in an East window or in a south or west-facing window with shading, such as a sheer curtain.

To determine the correct amount of light for your orchid place a piece of white paper where you want to grow your plant, then hold your hand one foot above the paper. If your hand casts a fuzzy shadow, the light is just right. Phals need between 50 percent and 70 percent humidity; this seems high to us but is easily achieved by setting your orchid in a tray filled with clean gravel and water. Make sure to keep the bottom of the pot just above the level of the water.

Water the Phal once a week, but don't allow the bark around the roots to dry completely, this may require more frequent watering if the pot is small. To water, flush the pot with water until it runs out the drainage hole. Water in the morning so that the leaves are dry by nightfall and never use cold water, this will cause your Phal to rot!

Feed Phals once each week, year-round. Use a fertilizer with a high middle number such as 20-30-20 or 9-18-9 at one-quarter the amount recommended on the product's label.

Repot Plants every 12-18 months, in the late spring, just after flowering, or when you see green tips developing on the roots. Use a well drained potting mix developed specifically for orchids.

Phals start blooming between January and March and the flowers can last until September. Once the Moth Orchid blooms for you, you will be hooked. You'll want to move on to an *Oncidium* (on-SID-ee-um). These bright yellow orchids look like clouds of small flamenco dancers. One of its common names is "Dancing Ladies." Some varieties of oncidiums bloom dark burgundy and fill your home with the fragrance of chocolate!

The only difference between growing Oncidiums and Phals is that the Oncidiums require more light. Put them in a south window, where you get a well-defined shadow on the white paper test noted above. Temperatures, humidity, watering, fertilizing, and repotting are all about the same as for a Phal. Oncidiums bloom from January to April.

It can take years for an orchid to bloom for the first time, so for best results, purchase an orchid that is already in bloom. You will spend more for a blooming plant, but it is the only way to be sure that your plant is old enough to flower. Expect to pay from \$15.00 to \$45.00 for a blooming orchid, depending on its size.

Rest assured, you can grow orchids. Think how impressed your friends and family will be when you say "Oh, of course I grow orchids - they are easy!"

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