

Novice Basic Orchid Information

American Orchid Society FAQs

Are orchids hard to grow?

No. They are no more difficult to grow than many popular flowering plants. Like any plant, an orchid needs water, fertilizer, light and air. If you grow other ornamental plants either in the garden or indoors, you can grow orchids

Aren't orchids terribly expensive?

Not any more. Once a hobby for the wealthy, orchids are now within the reach of any income. You can spend as little as you like. But trying to own only one orchid is like trying to eat one peanut.

Are all orchids the same?

Quite the contrary. No plant family is more diverse. The orchid family is the largest plant family, occupying almost all possible environments. From the thimble-sized *Mystacidium caffrum* to the 20-foot-tall *Renanthera storei*, orchids exhibit amazingly different shapes, forms and growth habits. Some orchids produce blossoms no larger than a mosquito; other orchid flowers are as large as a dinner plate. Your familiar corsage is just one of the thousands of attractive types that can be grown with ease, given the proper culture. And with today's propagation methods and current hybridizing trends, there are more choices to choose from than ever before.

Are orchids parasites?

Absolutely not! Of the approximately 20,000 species of orchids that grow around the world, not one is parasitic. In nature, many orchids cling to trees and bushes as a growth habit, but they take nothing from the host plant and do not injure it in any way. Orchids that grow on trees are called epiphytes or air plants.

Do orchids come from the tropics?

Some do. But every country in the world and every state in the United States, including Alaska, have orchids.

Do I need a greenhouse?

No. Many popular orchids can be grown in your home or under lights. In tropical and semi-tropical areas, they can often be grown in a shade house in the backyard or hung under a tree. When selecting plants, choose those that will survive in the environment you have to offer.

Should orchids be protected from drafts?

No, as a matter of fact, orchids require moving air. They do best where there is a steady, moist breeze. However, they should be positioned away from air-conditioning or hot-air vents.

What sort of soil do orchids need?

In nature, orchids can be divided into four types according to growing conditions. Most are classified as epiphytes, or air plants, which grow chiefly on trees. Lithophytes cling to the surfaces of rocks. Saprophytes grow in decaying vegetation on the forest floor. Finally, there are terrestrials, which anchor themselves in soil or sand. As most orchids are epiphytes, they can be grown in tree bark (fir or redwood), crumbled natural charcoal, pebbles, moss or mounted on tree-fern or cork plaques. Most orchids will not grow in soil or dirt because their roots must be able to dry out. Think of most orchids as air plants which if potted, require an open media in which to grow.

Are orchids short-lived?

Most are long-lived. In fact, some species are virtually immortal, given the proper attention. Divisions or propagations of orchids discovered in the 19th century are still growing and flowering today.

How often do orchids bloom?

It depends on the plant. Some bloom once a year, others bloom several times a year and some even bloom continuously.

How long do orchid blooms last?

It depends on the type as well as on cultural treatment. Blooms of hybrids of the genus *Cattleya* may last from one to four weeks on the plant. Those of the genus *Phalaenopsis* commonly last from one to four months.

Are orchids fragrant?

Some are so powerfully scented as to perfume an entire greenhouse or living room. A few orchid fragrances defy description, while others mimic familiar aromas — raspberry, coconut, lilacs and citrus. Others have no scent, but rely on shape and color to attract insects or birds for pollination, thereby continuing the life cycle of the species.

Where can I buy orchids?

Hundreds of orchid nurseries, many of which advertise monthly in *Orchids* magazine, exist in the United States and around the world. Visit the **Orchid Source Directory**, available at www.aos.org on the home page to find one near you or in the area that you plan to visit. Additionally, many fine growers will ship orchids right to your door! Today orchids are found in the "big box" stores and perhaps even in your local supermarket.

Is conservation of orchids an important issue?

Absolutely! Sadly, orchid species are becoming extinct faster than they can be described and classified. Threats to orchids originate primarily from loss of habitat and collecting. The AOS advocates the purchase of only artificially propagated orchids, either from meristems (clones) or seeds, which will help discourage the collecting of orchid species at home and abroad. For more information about this serious topic, and to learn how to get involved and to support conservation efforts, visit the American Orchid Society website, www.aos.org.

Where can I get more information?

First, check out the AOS's website at www.aos.org. You will find reliable information on how to grow all types of orchids. The AOS popular culture sheets written for novice growers are available for some of the more popular type of orchids. There is a section entitled ORCHID BASICS which answers many specific questions about growing orchids such as watering, feeding, and how to cut the spike on your phalaenopsis. There are 18 videos that share information including how to pot your orchid. Additionally, there are many excellent books available to help a novice grower learn more. The AOS offers a discount on its publications if you are a member. Amongst the many publications in this listing are a variety of illustrated handbooks published by the AOS. Most bookstores and public libraries have good orchid book selections also, as do some commercial orchid firms.

How can I find out about Orchid Society meetings?

Perhaps the most useful learning step is to become a member of your local orchid society. Currently, there are more than 400 orchid societies that are affiliated with the AOS scattered around the globe. A listing of these affiliated societies can be found at www.aos.org.

Should I become a member of the American Orchid Society?

Yes! There are many benefits to joining the AOS. A few are:

- Monthly subscription to ORCHIDS magazine
- Access to online orchid information and features available in the Members' Only section at www.aos.org
- Free and discounted admission to [more than 300 botanical gardens and arboreta](#)
- Receive the annual Orchid Source Directory detailing orchid suppliers worldwide
- 10% discount on AOS publications via phone, mail or on-line at www.aos.org

By joining or renewing now for a two-year period, you will receive a \$30 coupon good toward a \$100 purchase at select orchid nurseries nationwide!

For more detailed information regarding growing orchids, visit the American Orchid Society's website at www.aos.org



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Education. Conservation. Research.

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