

Beginning with Orchids!

Canadian Orchid Congress with lists of shows, societies in Canada, vendors, links to good sites and answers to some of your growing questions in the culture sheets (the ones on roots and leaves are particularly good):

<http://www.canadianorchidcongress.ca>

Jerry's Web Page: lots of good information

<http://retirees.uwaterloo.ca/~jerry/orchids/index.html>

American Orchid Society, which publishes the Orchids magazine available with membership. First time members also receive several small books on orchids. This site also has downloadable fact sheets for growing the most common sorts of orchids.

<http://www.orchidweb.org>

(note there is also an orchidweb.com which is unrelated and commercial)

Orchid Species: photos, descriptions and many growing tips for over 3000 different orchid species, discover the diversity:

<http://www.orchidspecies.com>

Windsor Greenhouse (my web page) which has information on planning and building greenhouses:

<http://www.windsorgreenhouse.com/>

You will also find useful the introductory books that are sometimes sold by the Orchid Society of Nova Scotia as well as the Ortho book on orchids available from bookstores.

For pest control, remove pests where possible with cotton and alcohol but remember if you can see them, then there is likely a large number of 'babies' that you cannot see crawling around. But removing adults helps to stop the cycle. Peel back brown 'paper' around pseudobulbs as that is a favorite hiding place and look on the underside of leaves and at the base of pseudobulbs and leaves. Try Safer's EndAll but you must spray every two or three days for a couple of weeks for it to be effective on scale. Safer's insecticidal soap is also good for many pests although it is weak on adult scale. Both are organic. To save money, buy the concentrate (Home Depot for one has it) and dilute it and use in an old washed spray bottle (not one that had perfumed soaps or cleaners!!!). A rule of thumb for insecticides: if the label says it is OK for African violets, then it is not likely to damage orchids. Keep spray off the flowers! For fungal infections, try powdered cinnamon and use as well when you cut off a pseudobulb, etc.

Do not divide your orchids!!! The exception is if the plant becomes too large to handle or a piece breaks off during repotting. Orchids like company and will often sulk if you split them into one or two growth divisions. Orchids grown to full 'specimen' size with many growths and flowers are the showiest and most prized. When you repot, remove any dead roots, leaves or pseudobulbs. The one exception is dendrobiums. Some types drop their leaves and then bloom on the leafless canes the following year. So long as the canes are still 'greenish' they should not be considered dead! Watch for new growths at the base of the plants. Sometimes new plants will grow on this type high on the canes. Some say this is due to overwatering during the winter dry period. You may remove these and replant them when there are two or three vigorous roots at least 2" long.

Water Quality: for orchids, we do not mean bacteria or coliform count, rather how much mineral and mineral salts there are dissolved in the water. This can be so-called hard water. If your other house plants has a white deposit around the bottom of the pot or on the surface or around the rim, then you probably have hard water. Since orchids are adapted to grow on trees and be bathed in rain water, they have difficulty coping with the high mineral content in much well or group water. It is best to use rain water, RO water from the Superstore (NOT Spring water, it has a high content!) or at the very least run it through a Brita filter when rainwater is not available. Never, ever use water than comes from a water softening system, it is the worst. You would become ill on fast food if you ate it three times a day, poor water does the same to your orchids.

Watering: most orchids do not like wet feet. A general rule of thumb is that if they have fine roots like paphs (lady slippers) or miltonias (pansy orchids) they should not be allowed to dry out. Plants with coarse roots and large pseudobulbs such as cattleyas (corsage type orchids) can dry out a little more. If the potting media is dry, then wet BEFORE you fertilize. Fertilize twice a month at 1/3 strength on the label. Use a high N in summer. A fertilizer with a high Potassium value (NOT the so called high Phosphorus Bloom Boosters will produce more flowers.) When you repot, place a few pieces of marble or rounded, washed pea or river gravel in the bottom to add drainage and help keep the pot from falling over. Some growers use styrofoam packing peanuts (but not the coloured ones).

Fertilize twice a month in the winter at half strength. The rest of the year, try to remember to fertilize 3 times a month at full strength if using an orchid fertilizer. For any other sort, reduce it to ½ strength. If you are forgetful, use the slow release hanging baskets pelleted fertilizer such as Osmocote or Smartcote 14-14-14. These last for 3 months.

Enjoy looking at your orchids, but do not handle the flowers and they will last longer. If you are a smoker, wash your hands before handling the plants as some are susceptible to tobacco mosaic virus.

If your plants are receiving a fair bit of sunlight, feel the leaves. If they are hot, then you need air circulation (a fan) to prevent sunburn and move them a little farther back from the window. A south window without air movement is generally too bright for any orchid in the summer. Many orchids enjoy living outside so long as the night temperatures are above 13 C. However, find a spot with mottled light, never full sun. Phalaenopsis (moth orchids) and lady slippers are an exception because water sitting in the crown will cause them to rot. But all orchids love rainwater. When buying orchids, choose the one with healthy roots and look for new whitish green plump roots.

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