

Emailed May 21, 2018

Orchids in the Home  
By Heidi Napier  
UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County  
For June 2018 Village Life

Orchids have a reputation for being difficult to grow, but many species do well in homes and in yards. There are more and more orchids available for purchase at grocery stores and nurseries, and many of these orchids do well under average home conditions, much like African Violets.

Phaelanopsis, or Moth Orchid, is the variety most commonly sold for growing indoors. The flowers come in many colors—white, yellow, purple, pink and even multicolor. These plants do well at indoor temperatures and the relatively low humidity found in most homes. Their natural bloom season is late winter to early spring, and the flowers may last one or two months. If you trim the spent flower stalk down to 4-8 inches, it may rebloom.

Insufficient light and too much water are the two main reasons that orchids do poorly in homes. They want strong indirect light such as from an east or south facing window. A skylight is almost ideal. Water should be given only once a week or when the growing medium is dry. Overwatering is the most common problem in potted orchids. Most are adapted to some water deprivation and the roots will rot if they sit in damp medium.

Most indoor orchids don't grow in soil because in their natural habitat, they grow on trees and their roots grow in the air. They often do best in a medium such as chunks of fir bark or coconut husk. They can be fertilized with African Violet fertilizer or fertilizer made especially for orchids.

There are several lovely species of orchids that grow outside in the soil in our climate. A few are native to California and may be purchased from native plant nurseries. One non-native is the lovely, easy-to-grow *Bletilla striata*, or Chinese Ground Orchid. It's grows from small bulb-like roots and produces pink or lavender blooms in June. It tolerates El Dorado County's winters, but it does go dormant in the winter.

Cymbidium is a very large, showy orchid that does well outdoors in the warmer parts of El Dorado County. It blooms in the winter and early spring, and the flowers are frost sensitive, so these plants need the protection of a covered porch or patio in the winter. Or one can use old fashioned, non-LED, Christmas lights to keep them from freezing. Cymbidiums can take full sun in the winter, but in the spring and summer, they need shade.

A free public education class on "Orchids In and Around the Home" is offered Wednesday, June 13, from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Dr, Cameron Park. Come learn more about these enchanting plants, their care, and which varieties are easiest to grow.

Visit us Fridays or Saturdays, 9am to noon at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, California. Note: Folsom Lake College charges \$2 dollars for parking (see parking kiosks for information and payment).

Emailed May 21, 2018

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master gardener e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.