



Ever-Blooming, Ever-Beautiful Orchids

By Kathy Ruiz

UCCE El Dorado Master Gardener

Are you the recipient of an orchid plant gift? Did the plant arrive with a beautiful and exotic looking bloom but it hasn't bloomed since? Read on to find out how to encourage your orchid to bloom again.

First, identify your orchid. If the plant did not come with a tag, the easiest way to identify it will be by its flower. Consult an orchid book with photographs or search online for sites to help with orchid identification for this task. Some of the most common orchids and easiest to grow indoors are Phalaenopsis, Paphiopedilum, and Odontoglossum.

Like all plants, orchids need light, moisture and the right growing medium to thrive. Temperature and humidity are also important factors.

Light is probably the single most important factor in getting your orchid to bloom. Many orchids need very bright light to bloom and may need more hours of light than can be accommodated in a bright south facing window during the winter months. During months of shorter days, augment natural light by growing your orchids under a grow light. Or, set up a light table with a timer to grow your orchid. This is an ideal way to control lighting and ensure that the plant is receiving the amount of light it needs.

Although some orchids grow in rain forests and have adapted to a very moist environment, it is possible to over water them in the home. Never let the orchid sit in water and generally it is a good idea to allow the roots to dry out between watering. However, follow the watering recommendations for your specific orchid cultivar.

Orchids require a different planting medium than the average houseplant. Most orchids in the wild do not grow in soil so to mimic their native conditions use one the commercially available orchid potting mixes. The mixes usually contain fir bark. Perlite and sphagnum moss are also good choices. These coarse materials promote excellent drainage but still retain water and nutrients for the plant. Fertilizing is best handled by providing a very diluted amount each time you water the plant.

Orchids need good air circulation and a higher level of humidity than is found in the average home. Setting the container on a tray of pebbles and water will provide that additional level of moisture in the air for them.

Orchids can be a lovely addition to your home. They are surprisingly easy to grow and very rewarding when they bloom. To learn more, attend a free class on Saturday, September 21st, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building on growing and caring for orchids in the home.

Come one - come all to the annual El Dorado Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale on September 28th, 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building Parking lot. Loads of plants tenderly grown by master gardeners will be available – succulents, fall and winter vegetables, and perennials.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. 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 Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find Master Gardeners on Facebook.