

Ray's Growing Guide - Phalaenopsis

Phalaenopsis are a group of plants that grow in shady, humid conditions throughout the Asian tropics and extend into northern Australia. They are arguably the most popular group of orchids grown in the world today, being particularly popular throughout the United States and Europe where they are regarded as one of the easiest orchids to grow indoors.

Temperature & Atmosphere Requirements:

Phalaenopsis enjoy relatively stable temperatures. A minimum temperature of 15 degrees celsius and a maximum of 30 degrees is optimal, however plants will tolerate temperatures of up to 5 degrees more extreme than this for short periods. Growing these plants outdoors in New South Wales will require some artificial heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. However their requirements fall almost perfectly within the comfort zone we enjoy inside the house. Phalaenopsis also require medium to high humidity. This can be achieved by placing the plants on a saucer of gravel, wet the gravel but be sure the base of the pot is above the water level. As the water evaporates, adequate humidity will be provided. Alternatively, mist the plants daily.

Light:

Phalaenopsis enjoy low light and must be protected from direct, unfiltered sunlight. Outdoors ensure there is sufficient shade so that on a sunny day a barely discernable shadow is cast over the plant is ideal. Indoors a brightly lit room out of direct sun is suitable.

Watering & Fertilising:

One of the secrets of growing Phallies is to keep the roots just damp but the leaves as dry as possible. This means that the compost should be allowed to nearly dry out before watering. After watering dry the leaves off as quickly as possible, especially any water lying in the crown of the plant where the leaves join. To help this avoid watering the leaves, or place the plants in a breezy spot for an hour or two after watering. Even removing excess water from the leaves with a tissue will serve the same purpose. Fertilise with a recommended soluble orchid fertiliser at quarter strength every watering or at half strength every second watering. A complete fertiliser low in nitrogen is ideal to use all year round.

Potting, Pests & Diseases:

Keep plants in as small a pot as possible. A few roots growing out of the pot will not harm the plant and is not necessarily a reason to pot up the plant. Use a coarse, free draining mix. Some growers prefer sphagnum moss, but use long strand grade and replace it annually. Apart from crown rot which can be avoided by careful watering, Phalaenopsis can suffer attack from Mealy Bugs. These appear as small furry white pests, usually under the leaves. They can be sprayed with Pyrethrum or a chemical insecticide or Pest Oil, or wet them with equal parts of Metholated spirits and water using a cotton bud or a small cloth.

Phalaenopsis are very rewarding plants to grow and flowers last up to 12 weeks. When flowers have withered, cut the flower stem off between the third and fourth notch from the base. The old stem will then shoot and flower a second time. Mature plants will flower twice each year so flowering can be achieved for up to half the year. Flowers are available in white, pink or yellow or with variations of spotting or veining on these backgrounds.