

The ties that bind

Doctor Fred

In the wild, one of the first concerns of a young orchid is to securely fasten its roots onto something to achieve stability and security. In domestic culture the orchid which is not properly secured will not thrive.

It is instructive to attach a surplus orchid to a suitable tree with some soft pantyhose (remembering to remove this after the plant establishes itself to avoid damage to orchid or the tree). If the orchid is happy with its host the roots will burrow securely into the bark.

Some small plants such as Phalaenopsis can be simply secured by the potting mix (especially well packed moist sphagnum moss), but orchids are most commonly secured in their pot by tying to stakes. Stakes come in many sizes but for small plants sate sticks or barbeque skewers are available in a range of lengths from supermarkets and two-dollar shops.

There are many varieties of ties to choose from, including butterfly clips (used to stabilize flower spikes), and plastic or Teflon coated wire. Thin wires can cut into the plant so the flat type is preferred. Spools of this are readily available commercially and easily cut to individual lengths. The tie should leave some room for growth. It is preferable to attach ties to mature rhizomes as they are less likely to become constricted than those in rapid growth. Traditionally the tie is looped in a figure of eight configuration, to help reduce the risk of constriction.

Stakes and ties should be removed as soon as the plant is established and before they cause problems. I personally dislike stakes because of their potential to damage your eyes.

As an alternative, with hanging pots and baskets the plant can be secured to the hanger itself.

Very small or awkward shaped plants, particularly those with small rhizomes can be difficult to secure in the usual way. They are usually best secured with a long tie through the bottom of the pot. Once the plant is in position in the mix, thread the two ends through different holes using those closest to the selected point on the rhizome or bulb. The two ends are then twisted securely together and remain accessible on top of the plant. It may be necessary to retighten them later as the mix packs down.

The loop of wire through the bottom may make the pot unstable, so I put the pot inside another to stop it falling over.