**SELECTION**

Knowing which orchid you are trying to grow is your key to its cultural needs. Most tropical orchids are *epiphytes*, meaning they grow on trees or rocks in nature rather than in soil. Orchids, like all plants, need a balance of light, air, water and food to grow and flower well.

**CARE**

**Light:** Without enough light, orchids may produce lush looking growth but no flowers. Orchids grown under sufficient light will not have lush, dark green foliage but will have lighter, somewhat yellow-green foliage and strong upright growth. Not giving orchids enough light is the most common reason for failure to bloom.

**Air:** Orchid roots, and eventually the entire plant, will die if they do not get air. With the exception of a few terrestrial varieties, orchids do not grow in soil. The orchid potting mixture should allow for good drainage but be capable of holding sufficient moisture to support the plant’s needs. Orchid plants are also intolerant of a stale, stagnant environment. A well-ventilated growing area also discourages disease.

**Water:** More orchids are killed by incorrect watering than for any other reason. Proper watering consists of quality and frequency. Orchids should be watered just as they dry out. There is no magic formula, but if you water a plant in a 6” pot every 7 days you should be trouble free. There are several ways to determine when a potted orchid is almost dry:

1. the surface of the potting mix will appear dry
2. dry pots feel lighter
3. clay pots feel dry
4. a wooden stake or skewer inserted into the potting mix will come out almost dry

When watering, water should be provided until it runs freely from the drainage hole.

**Fertilizer:** Orchids will grow and flower, given that their other needs are met, for fairly long periods without fertilizer, but you will get better results with some level of feeding. Typically, plants are fertilized once a week during the summer and every two weeks in the fall and winter. Regardless of the fertilizer that you chose to use, it is suggested that you use no more than 1/2 the label-recommended strength. It is best to water first to wet the potting mix before you fertilize.

**Re-potting:** The most common potting mixes are either coarse bark mixes (you can find orchid potting mixes at most garden centers), or sphagnum moss. Which to use depends on the type of orchid, temperature and humidity, and how often you have time to water. The best time to re-pot is generally when you see new roots about an inch long starting at the base of the plant or the plant has a rhizome that is growing over the edge of the pot. Plants potted in bark should be re-potted every 2-3 years to keep the bark from breaking down. Plants in moss should be re-potted at least annually. If the plant is growing well, it is best to use a similar potting mix.

Observation is the most important key to growing orchids well. Examining your plants on a regular basis will allow you to adjust and correct any problems before they become severe.