

In or Out?

Where Are Orchids Happiest?

Text and Photos by Joy Derksen, Master Gardener Volunteer

There are pros and cons no matter where your orchids live. Perhaps it comes down to your style of caring for your plants. All orchid species have specific requirements for a healthy life and healthy blooms. It is up to the owner to find out how much light, water, and fertilizer each type of plant needs. If you are going to grow orchids, a simple reference book will help you determine what makes your orchid happy. Manatee County libraries have good selections. You can also purchase a guidebook from the American Orchid Society.

Indoor orchids are not frequently bothered by insects and fungus which can be a problem outside. It is an easy matter to scout out problems in the house. Lighting needs can be met by the right amount of sun in a window or by artificial lighting. *Phalaenopsis* will probably get enough light in an east or west window.

What is harder to get right indoors is an orchid's need for humidity and circulating air. Heating and air conditioning both leave the air in the home quite dry. Orchids like moving, warm, humid air. Here is where your gardening style comes in. Are you willing to mist your orchids daily? Are you the type of person who checks frequently to see if the potting medium is dry? I had a good friend, a perfectionist, who kept orchids in his basement on nursery shelves with an automatic misting system and varied grow lights for different species. His orchids were outstanding and bloomed on schedule.

Many orchids can be grown outside in our area of Florida because it resembles the subtropical and tropical areas in which they originated. We've got the humidity, the circulating air, and the warmth they need. Even our winters provide the twenty-degree temperature drop that many plants need to bloom. Most of our yards can supply the filtered light that many orchids want.

But outdoor orchids do have pest problems. Giant lubber grasshoppers chew on leaves. Aphids and mites blow in with the wind. Scale and mealy bugs suddenly appear. Squirrels have been known to eat the bulbs.

Outdoor orchids will probably never look as perfect as carefully grown indoor orchids. Sunburn spots appear on leaves as the season changes and we forget to move them to a better place. If you are not overly particular about perfection, you can hang your orchids under an oak tree, and they will bloom. You can hang them on a shaded fence and the Florida rains or irrigation system will water them. In an orchid pot the extra water runs out the bottom of the pot.

So, outdoor orchids are probably for the gardener who is not a perfectionist but enjoys the flowers. Regular attention, fertilization, and scouting for insects can make outdoor orchids thrive with less effort than indoor orchids.



Phalaenopsis (white flower) and
Psychopsis (orange flower)



Pansy Orchid (*Miltonia* sp.)



Cattleya



ASK A MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER

Q. Dear Master Gardener Volunteer:

I'm a Manatee County resident with a mystery plant that has popped up in my mulch bed. I've attached a photo & wondered if you could identify it. Its roots are strong because I tried to pull it out and couldn't!

Thanks, L.K.



A. Dear L.K.:

Your mystery plant is *Eulophia graminea*, Chinese crown orchid. Although it gets a cute little flower, this orchid is an escaped exotic species and is considered invasive. It first appeared in Miami in 2007 in a mulched bed and has advanced northward. It prefers mulch, and that is a means by which it spreads. However, the possibility of this invasive species crowding out natives in places other than mulched beds poses a threat. They are not hard to pull if you loosen around the pseudobulb and give it a yank. It's recommended that you dispose of them in your regular trash as opposed to yard trash.

I have included links to publications about the orchid:

<https://goorchids.northamericanorchidcenter.org/species/eulophia/graminea/>

<http://charlottecountyextension.blogspot.com/2015/10/invasive-orchid-resurgence-in-charlotte.html>

Master Gardener Volunteer Karen Holleran
answers your email questions.

Send questions and/or photos for identification or for
diagnosis of residential gardening problems to
ManateeMG@gmail.com.

Or call us during office hours 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at
941-722-4524 and ask for a Master Gardener Volunteer.



What's This? ICE CUBES and Orchids?

By Helen Pausenwein, Master Gardener Volunteer

Orchids you buy may come with advice that you should water them with ice cubes. Don't do it! Orchids that come with that advice are grown in huge greenhouses in huge quantities. These companies use inexpensive pots with little or no drainage. To further save costs, these same orchids are packed in dense moss, which does not allow the roots to dry out or get any air at all. These orchids are not meant to last more than a few months to a year at most, unless repotted.

Phalaenopsis (moth orchid) roots and their plant parts need to get plenty of drainage, air movement, and moisture. Without these conditions, the orchids quickly die. It is a good idea to re-pot an orchid every two years or so using special orchid mixture or bark in proper orchid pots.

Have You Been Bitten by the Orchid Bug?



Photos & Text by Maureen Hirthler, Master Gardener Volunteer



Cattleya



Rhyncostylis coelestis



Phalaenopsis

Perhaps you received an orchid as a gift and now want more. But how do you buy an orchid? What kind? Where do you go? How do you choose a healthy plant? Great questions!

Supermarket and big box store orchids aren't always a good buy for beginners. You don't know where they came from, how they were cared for, or if they have pests or diseases. This is also true of some online marketplaces.

The best place to get your orchid is an orchid society show, held usually in the fall and winter. The growers have good advice and often sale prices.

Our local area also has several excellent orchid farms. They often have a spring and fall Open Houses, and you can talk with the owners about choosing a healthy plant. Local nurseries with an orchid room have knowledgeable staff to guide you in selection and care.

Mail-order is another great way to shop. When you join the American Orchid Society (AOS) (<http://www.aos.org/>) you will get a list of recommended on-line dealers and a discount coupon for any purchase from them. I buy most of mine this way and am rarely disappointed.

So, let's pick an orchid. Plan on spending about \$25 for a blooming size plant. I recommend a *Phalaenopsis* or *Cattleya* hybrid, which are bred for easy growing, fungal resistance, and better and bigger flowers.

The biggest caveat for getting a healthy plant is that you buy roots, not flowers. Tug a bit on the plant; it should sit firmly in the pot. If there are exposed roots, make certain they are fat and healthy by running your fingers down one to see if it is mushy or breaks easily. Have the seller wiggle it out of the pot so you can see more of the root system. Look for a plant that doesn't have a lot of wild roots growing out of the pot (some are fine) or circular roots at the bottom. Examine the leaves, which should be a mid-range green, and in *Phalaenopsis* and *Cattleya*, firm and sturdy. Look for signs of new growth, and check for pests and diseases. Finally, see what media is in the pot, and get a tag with the exact name of the orchid.

The best guide for a new orchid enthusiast is the AOS booklet "Your First Orchid." It's free when you join or can be purchased on their website. It answers every possible question you might have about choosing and caring for the perfect plant for your new orchid collection.

The Manatee County Extension has Master Gardener Volunteers with many years of experience growing orchids who are happy to help you. Please leave a message at 941-722-4524 or ManateeMG@gmail.com, and we will get back with you. Our greenhouse also has an excellent orchid collection for sale during our Plant Fair, and we can advise you about how to select a healthy plant that is easy to grow in our area. Your lanai could soon be filled with these rewarding plants.

Helpful websites:

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/orchids.html> - Helpful information on orchid care with links to even more articles.

<https://www.sforchid.com/category/orchid-care/seasons/> - The South Florida Orchid society newsletter

<https://www.sarasotamagazine.com/news-and-profiles/2015/01/top-tips-orchid-care>

Suggestions from Selby Gardens orchid gurus.

<https://longwoodgardens.org/events-performances/events/everything-about-orchids-online-open-class> - Free (!) on-line class so that you can become a better orchid parent.



Orchid Care Post Bloom

By John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

Your orchid has stopped blooming, now what?

There are several things you can do. If the flowers have fallen into the pot, remove them, or trim the stalks. It may be necessary to repot your orchids at this time as well.

Trimming Flower Stalks:

When making any cuts on an orchid, your cutting tools and hands should be sterilized. Sanitization is important to control spreading of disease and fungus. You can apply cinnamon powder to cuts as an additional control measure.

Orchids, in general, will not put out more flowers on a spent stalk. The *Phalaenopsis* or moth orchid is an exception. If you need to trim your moth orchid stalk: find where the first flower was attached, follow the stalk down to the next or second node, look for a new bud and cut the stalk about ½ inch above this node. If your plant is struggling, you may want to cut off the flower stalk to allow for new leaf and root growth.

Repotting:

One reason to repot is to renew the potting material. Organic mixes last about two years.

Orchids like to be snug inside their pots, but when their roots start growing up and over their pot rims, it is time to repot them.

To repot, gently remove the WET plant from its old pot. Check the health of the roots and plan on putting it into a slightly larger orchid pot, using orchid mix specially blended for orchids (not garden soil.)

Orchid roots (white with green tips) and new shoots (bud eyes) break easily and need to be handled gently. Remove all dead roots and pseudo bulbs (yellow and brown).

If your orchid was doing fine in a plastic pot (retains less moisture), repot in plastic. But if in a clay pot (retains more moisture), use clay. You will be repotting for the root system, not the foliage. Choose the smallest container for two years' growth. Bigger is not better!

After cleaning the orchid, if it looks like it will fit back in the old pot, use it. Sanitize the old pot by soaking it in a solution of one-part bleach to nine parts water. Be sure to scrub inside and out. Then rinse the pot with plenty of fresh water, as bleach will harm your orchid.

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All orchids are either monopodial or sympodial. With monopodial orchids, the stem grows from a single bud, leaves are added from the apex each year, and the stem grows longer (usually vertically). With sympodial orchids, the plant produces a series of adjacent shoots which grow to a certain size, bloom, and then stop growing.

Sympodial orchids can be split, if each split contains at least three leafy stalks. Repot each split into a new pot. The growth develops new shoots, with their own leaves and roots, sprouting from or next to those of the previous year, as in *Cattleyas*.

Certain *Cattleyas* put out sheaths where a flower stalk will emerge. Remove only sheaths where spent flower stalks have emerged. If you remove an unopened sheath, even though it looks gray and dry, you will lose the emerging flower. *Cattleyas* should be placed in the pot with the old growth close to the pot rim and new growth to the center.

Many orchids, such as *Cattleyas* and *Oncidiums*, have pseudobulbs, which are

fleshy stems that store water and nutrients. If you overwater these varieties, they may rot and die. *Phalaenopsis* and *Vanda* orchids don't have pseudobulbs to store water, so water them thoroughly when the potting mix is nearly dry to keep them from completely drying out.

When repotting *Phalaenopsis*, place the orchid in the center of the pot so that its crown sits just on top of the bark and tilted to the side so that water does not sit in the base. Lightly pack potting mix around its roots. *Phalaenopsis* mixes will contain more sphagnum moss, retaining more moisture. *Phalaenopsis* orchids like to have roots both below and above the potting mix.

Do not fertilize any repotted orchid until new leaves emerge. Then fertilize normal strength with a water-soluble orchid fertilizer, mixed according to label directions. Learn the orchid mantra, "Fertilize weekly, weakly," using ½ label directions during a rest period. Having done all this, it's time to wait for the next blooming.

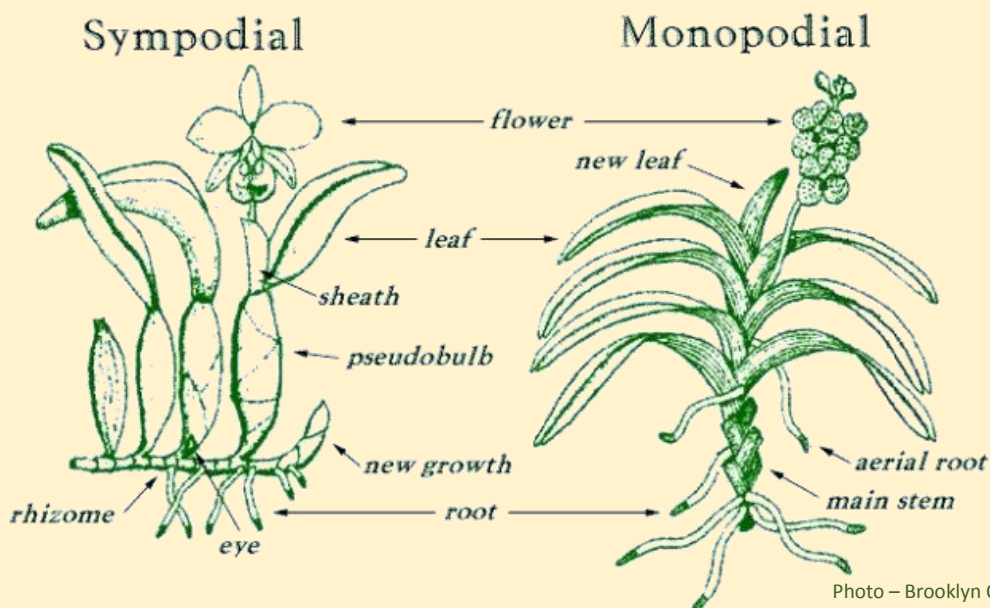


Photo – Brooklyn Orchids

By Helen Pausenwein and Amy Stripe, Master Gardener Volunteers

Can you grow orchids in full sun?

Typically, orchids do not like full-on sunlight. If your orchid's leaves are yellow or even showing brown streaking, that may be a sign of too much sun and sunburn. On the other hand, deeply green leaves may indicate too little light. Go for some shade or filtered sun outdoors and bright, indirect light indoors. If you hang your orchid on a tree branch, remember some trees lose all their leaves in the cooler seasons, and your orchid might be in direct sun then.

Can I leave my orchids outdoors all year?

Only if you live in frost-free areas of the state. Hanging your orchids under branches of trees or in lanais provides some protection from the cold. But in the event of four plus hours or more of below freezing temperatures, outdoor orchids are likely to suffer. Frost damage will show up as mushy leaves or black streaks; this is an invitation for fungal pathogens to move in.

Are there seasonal requirements for orchid culture?

Yes, during drier months of the year, they will need more water. Fertilizer requirements vary by flowering time, but in general too much fertilizer forces new vegetative growth instead of blooms. Know what kind of orchid you have and when it blooms, then you will know when to fertilize. During winter months, less fertilizer is better.

What kind of pots are best?

Shallow, squat pots (plastic or clay) with lots of holes and good drainage are best. Orchids need air flow and low moisture retention. Orchids are naturally air plants. Do not put them in bigger pots than they need, or all they will do is produce roots and not flowers.

What potting medium is best?

Natural fibers are good, such as coir (husks from coconut palms) and other palm tree fibers. Special mixes are available in the box stores which contain bark, perlite (drainage & air) and charcoal (keeps mixture fresh).



Clamshell Orchid
Prosthechea cochleata

Photo: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>



Orchid Societies

Text and Photos by John Dawson, Master Gardener Volunteer

For the first 55 years of my life I never knew anyone who had orchids. The only ones I had ever seen were worn on wrists at proms (my first orchid purchase). Being a Master Gardener in Maryland, we never had to deal with orchid questions. Moving to Florida and becoming a Florida Master Gardener changed everything.

Upon our arrival, friends presented my wife and I with our first orchid, a *Phalaenopsis*. Of course, we did not have a clue what to do with it. Our first orchid book "Orchids for Dummies" kept it alive that first year, but it never bloomed.

Then a fellow Manatee County Master Gardener Volunteer invited me to a meeting of the Manatee Orchid Society of which he was a member. The folks were so nice and set me right at ease about my lack of orchid knowledge. I came back with my wife the next month. After winning our second orchid in the raffle and meeting a lot of great friendly

people, she was hooked. We've been members ever since and our orchid collection has grown exponentially. After finally learning how to properly grow our original *Phalaenopsis*, we were rewarded with gorgeous white blooms that lasted nearly all year. There are four orchid clubs in our area.

Here are some local orchid societies. Consult websites for meeting times, have they have changed in the COVID-19 era.

Manatee Orchid Society Woman's Club at 1705 Manatee Avenue West in Bradenton at 7 p.m.
<http://www.manateeorchidsociety.com>.

Sarasota Orchid Society holds regular meetings in the Activities Center on the grounds of the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens at 811 South Palm Avenue in Sarasota, Florida.
<http://www.sarasotaorchidsociety.org>.

Caution: Orchids can be habit forming; the next one is never enough. There's always that other one you've just got to have!

August

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

UF

Date	Time	Event
Wednesday July 22	1:00-2:00 p.m.	Palm Diseases – What’s the Matter With my Palm? (Free Webinar) This webinar introduces you to palm diseases, disorders, and normal abnormalities. Register here: https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_iGPYw6nXTT2H1dbjKffKBA
Wednesday August 5	10:00-11:00 a.m.	Herbs for Central Florida (Free Webinar) The world of herbs is wide and varied. Get an introduction to these useful plants and the species that grow best in Central Florida. Register here: https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_hGP6gKgRQUCbH5hNFsyJfA
Wednesday August 12	10:00-11:00 a.m.	Growing an Herb Garden (Free Webinar) Learn techniques for gardening with herbs including growing in beds and containers, care and maintenance, propagating plants, and harvesting tips. Register here: https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_e9sVVd3SSDeEd4p5_fYzQA
Wednesday August 19	10:00-11:00 a.m.	Herbs in your Daily Life (Free Webinar) You have succeeded in growing your own herbs, now you want to know what to do with your green harvest. Discover the benefits of herbs, including medicinal values. Learn how to use herbs the natural way in your daily life, such as adding fresh or dried and seeds to your daily diet or creating creams and lotions for your skin. Simple recipes will help you integrate herbs daily. Register here: https://ufl.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Lo6KbiSYS-C4NfATjfwgWw

Past Webinar Presentations for Your Viewing Pleasure:

UF IFAS Extension
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA



Native Plants for the Home Landscape (Free Webinar)

Presented by Susan Griffith, Manatee County Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Program Coordinator. You can access the presentation slides and webinar recording with this link: https://ufl.zoom.us/rec/share/7uN_ML_QxztIcK_h2mjgcZcYItjkeaa82igZrqcNmh24i2tnlCI8H-26RsHEs6cz

Backyard Vegetable Gardening (Free Webinar)

Presented by Alyssa Vinson, Manatee County Residential Horticulture Agent
You can access the presentation slides and webinar recording with this link: https://ufl.zoom.us/rec/share/65xpMa7q90VIQY2OwhiOZL98Ab20X6a80yAerPRezRllcppGyHAXF-mZK0OMk_42

Palm Care (Free Webinar)

Presented by Amy Stripe Master Gardener Volunteer
You can access the presentation slides and webinar recording with this link: https://ufl.zoom.us/rec/share/68lPd-Cp209OY9bE6FyFU7YrGov5aaa82nAc_PAOykyWeYPsMGdsa7g1CMcu3qOc

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