

EASY, BREEZY, BEAUTIFUL ORCHIDS

> Orchids, the plants and sprays that have long possessed elite status, have gone mainstream. Thanks to mericloning propagation, it's possible to successfully produce consistently sized and colored plants outside their natural habitat. Consequently, orchid production (especially phalaenopsis and dendrobium varieties) has exploded worldwide, making orchid plants and cuts affordable. These beautiful plants are more resilient than they look, and cut sprays are easy to care for following a few basics.

Temp and Humidity

Most orchids (cut and potted) suffer chill damage when held colder than 50 F, but they don't require cooling as they move through the chain. Hold and transport orchids between 50 F and 60 F with 90 percent to 95 percent humidity. Amy Vongpitaka from Amy's Orchids said that cut stems are cooled to 50 F immediately after harvest and handled at 50 F throughout postharvest and grading. Harvest temperatures in Thailand are often greater than 110 F in April and May, so cooling plays an important role in reducing harvest stress and water loss.

A traditional wholesaler flower cooler is too cold for corsages or orchid leis. A kitchen fridge is too cold and too dry to hold orchids. Remember, chill damage occurs fast — four to six hours at temperatures colder than 50 F. Wholesale alert: if a back stock cooler is the only storage option, double-box leis and orchid stems. Fill the gap at box ends with bunched paper to keep cold air from leaking through precooling holes. Tape precooling holes and keep boxes closed.

Ethylene Kills Fast

Most orchids are extremely ethylene-sensitive. Exposure to a minute amount for a short time causes florets to appear veiny and buds to shrivel, flop or drop off. Conscientious growers treat cut stems with anti-ethylene solution in postharvest — STS. Potted plants should be treated during transit with 1-MCP gas (i.e. Ethylene Buster or EthylBloc) to protect blooms from exposure to external ethylene sources such as smoke, auto exhaust, space heaters, fruits and veggies. Expect about two weeks of vase life for treated cut sprays and approximately two months of life for treated plants, but less than a week for untreated products.

Processing Cut Orchid Sprays

For all types (except *Vanda sp.* and Tiger Tail), remove cotton or water tubes on arrival and give stems a fresh cut. Place in a low-sugar display flower food. The nutrients provide energy for bud opening, longevity and color stability. Solutions are active for five or six days. Allow condensation inside sleeves to evaporate before placing flowers in a tropical cooler at 50 F to 55 F. *Vanda* and 'Tiger Tail' are best treated in filtered water (not tap water), without flower food. Change filtered water daily..

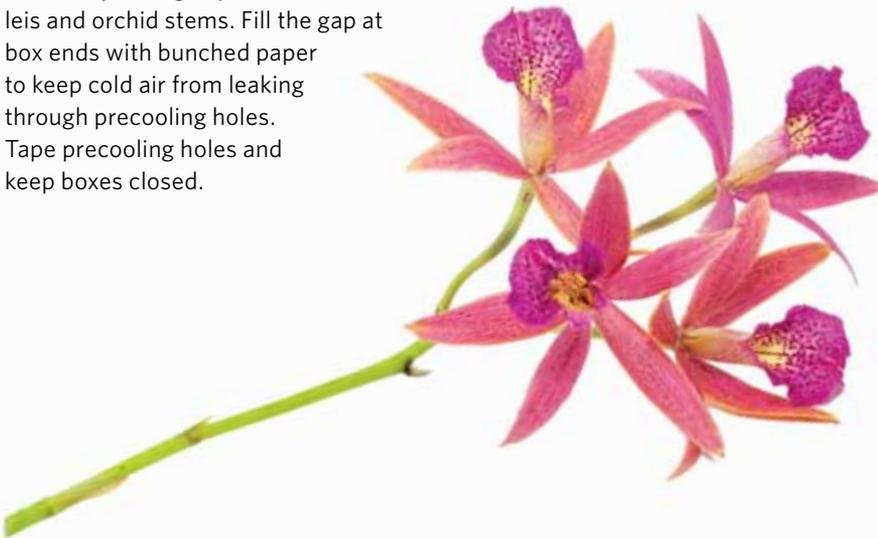


Potted Phalaenopsis Plants Success

Phalaenopsis like bright, indirect light. Let foliage be your guide — look for leaves that are firm and medium green. Floppy, long, dark green leaves mean the plant is not getting enough light. Temperature preferences hover around 60 F to 75 F. Good air movement is important, but most important is to avoid overwatering. Check soil media — bark dries faster than peat. If you're unsure, wait two or three days. Remove the plant from the pot and place it in warm (filtered) water for 10 to 20 minutes. Flush the surface with a gentle stream to wash away salts. Never let plants sit in water; roots drown fast. Water once every seven to 10 days.

After blooming, cut faded flower stalk an inch above soil surface. Allow the plant to rest four to five weeks in a cool, light area (+/-55 F) to stimulate flowering. Then place the plant in its original position.

A final tip: Orchids love crowded roots. Tell customers not to repot for at least two years after purchase. 🌿



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