

Phalaenopsis (Moth) Orchids



Phalaenopsis, or moth orchids are the most common orchids you can find. They can be found in garden centers, supermarkets, and even home improvement stores. Their popularity comes from the fact that they are easy to care for and that their delicate flowers that grow along graceful stems, can last for months at a time if properly cared for.

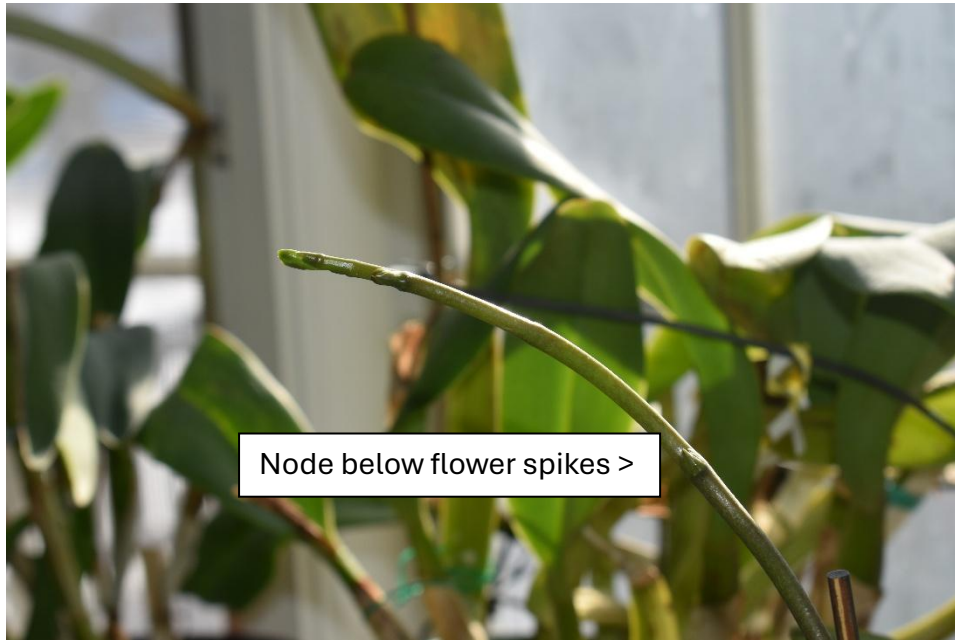
You can find moth orchids in a variety of colors, mostly white, pink, or pale yellow, many with intricate color patterns on the flowers. In the past few years growers have been featuring moth orchids with blue flowers. This is achieved when the growers inject a dye into a new flower stem before the flowers are produced. Be aware that once the flowers on that stem die out and a new flower stem is produced, the flowers that appear will be the natural color innate to that plant and not the artificial color that you first enjoyed. Mother nature can only be fooled for so long.

Throughout its life (and a moth orchid will never die of old age) you should give your moth orchid the warm shade that it enjoys in its native environment, southeast Asia. That means night temperatures should never fall below 65 degrees, and day temperatures should remain the mid 70's. Moth orchids can enjoy fairly bright light, but their foliage tends to burn when exposed to direct sun. I grow my moth orchids in a bright south facing bay window but shield them from the direct sun by placing them behind larger orchids that prefer the brighter sunlight.

Like most orchids, they are happiest when their roots are crowded. Water your plants every 1 to 2 weeks, allowing them to dry out slightly between waterings. I water my plants in the kitchen sink and allow them to drain before moving them back to their normal growing space. They do not like their roots to sit in water, and they do not like drafts

When moth orchid flowers die off, many ask how to promote the growth of a new flower spike on the existing stem. You can do that by cutting the stem just above the node directly below the one that gave rise to your flowers. It is usually the 4th or 5th node from the base of

your plant. Cutting the stem in this way will allow your plant to send out a shoot with additional flowers. Those flowers, however, will not be as vigorous, numerous, or last as long as the ones that died off. And by doing so you are robbing some of the vitality from the next stem that will arrive several months in the future. So do it at your peril.



When a new stem starts to grow, you will be tempted to attach it to a curved stake so it can be gracefully supported as the flowers begin to open. Growers do that all the time. But in doing so, be very careful. New stems are very brittle, and there is no worse feeling than breaking off a new stem by trying to bend it.

One final note: The roots of a moth orchid are very thin, very much like a fine hair. They are imbedded in white sheaths that grow from your plant base. Over time they become gangly and can detract from the beauty of your plant. That is the time for repotting. Remove your plant from its pot, remove the old potting medium that encompasses the plant roots, and place it in the center of a new pot **that is one inch larger in diameter**. Then use a mixture of pine bark, perlite and sphagnum moss to repot your plant, packing it firmly into the new pot. It will hold moisture but still allow your roots to breathe.

Moth orchids are one of nature's many wonders. They are easy to grow and their flowers last for many months. **But unlike many other orchids they are not fragrant. Growers have recently, however, propagated varieties that are advertised as producing fragrant flowers. Last fall I purchased such a plant. It was pricy, small, and will probably not send up a flower shoot for several years. Oh, well. We'll see. I'll keep you posted. If it's true, what more can you ask for?**