

# 2023 YEAR OF THE ORCHID

Orchidaceae, the Orchid family, is a diverse group of flowering plants belonging to the Liliopsida class. Found on every continent except Antarctica, orchids are one of the largest families of flowering plants. With more than 28,000 species, there are more orchids on the planet than mammals and birds! According to fossil research, orchids have been around for approximately 100 million years. Centuries ago, these blooming beauties were once seen as a rare and luxurious item to own. However, by the 19th century, advanced growing techniques allowed various types of orchids to become more accessible to home gardeners all around the world.





## Basic types

Characterized by their bilateral symmetric flowers and upward facing blooms, orchids are a beautiful and mysterious species. The vast orchid family includes the commonly cultivated plants like Phalaenopsis or Cattleya as well as the Vanilla plant, one of primary sources of the ever-popular flavoring. Most orchids in the market today are hybrids that have been bred for their gorgeous blooms and ease of care in the home. When choosing an orchid to purchase, it is important to learn about its natural environment and conditions to give it the best chance of thriving in your home.

- Phalaenopsis, also known as the moth orchid, are popular for their easy-care and large, long-lasting blooms, making them a great addition to the beginning house plant hobbyist's collection.
- Cattleya is often called the queen of orchids. With proper care, cattleyas can bloom in the home year after year.
- Oncidium are commonly referred to as the "dancing lady" orchid due to their highly modified ruffled blooms.
- Dendrobium are a large group of orchids that boast many pastel-toned blooms.
- Vanda orchids have flat flowers and bloom several times a year under greenhouse-like growing conditions. They are most well known for their cascading root systems that can be difficult to contain in a pot.
- Cymbidium flower spikes can last from one to three months with a natural blooming season during the winter. Cymbidium are commonly referred to as "boat orchids" because of the shape of their lip.
- Sobralia are characterized by short-lived colorful flowers and are often found in hobbyist collections.
- Vanilla planifolia are one of the primary sources for vanilla flavoring. Vanilla blooms are small and only appear once per year.
- Paphiopedilums are easily grown as houseplants and more commonly known as the "slipper orchid" due to the slipper shape of its bloom's lower pouch.
- Brassavola orchids have narrow white petals that release a fragrant perfume in the evenings.

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## GARDENING TIPS

- In nature, many orchid types are epiphytes, meaning that they attach to tree branches and take in nutrients from decaying bark and tropical rains. But, in order to bring orchids to our homes, most are planted in a rooting medium that lends itself to the unique epiphytic roots.
- Orchids are amazing plants because their visible roots can indicate how much moisture they need. If the plant needs more moisture, the roots will look silvery. Roots that are severely dehydrated look wrinkled and tan. On the flip side, dark and mushy roots are overwatered and beginning to rot. The goal is plump roots that are green after watering, returning to a silvery-green color as they dry off.
- In their natural habitat, orchids receive filtered light under the protection of the forest canopy. However, orchids grown indoors need to receive quite a lot of indirect sunlight to thrive and produce blooms. Best growth activity occurs when the orchid receives 10-16 hours of indirect light. Just be sure to protect them from harsh sunrays as they can easily get sunburnt!
- Orchids do not like “wet feet”, but they do appreciate a bit of humidity. Try placing your orchid on a humidity tray to help increase the immediate atmospheric humidity around the plant.
- Many orchids have a reproductive (flowering) cycle and a vegetative (non-flowering) cycle. Basically, what this means is that your plant will spend a period focusing on flower production and a period focusing on leaf and root production. During the vegetative cycle, it is actively recovering and preparing to re-flower, so it is key that you provide the water, light and nutrients it needs to recover. Orchids can remain non-flowering/vegetative for 6-9 months before producing a new bloom, so don't get discouraged if you don't see results right away. Patience is key!

