**Primetime**

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**Orchid Fandango**

Many gardeners think orchids are difficult to grow. There are some that can challenge the most skillful gardener, but there are also a number of orchids that are very easy to grow. My favorite is the phalaenopsis or moth orchid.

Phalaenopsis flowers are borne on stalks above the large waxy, floppy leaves. Flowers are two to three inches across in the shape of a moth. Our phalaenopsis orchids begin their bloom period about November and the flowers last until April or May. Undoubtedly there will be a large selection of Phalaenopsis orchids in bloom at Orchid Fandango. Stalks can hold 15 or even more blooms but seven or eight is more likely.

Colors range from pure white through pink and deep lavender. We grow our phalaenipsis orchids in a bark medium (chunks of bark). Bark takes a little getting used to. It makes you want to water frequently because it is hard to believe that the plants can obtain enough water and nutrients from such a coarse growing medium. The “good news” is that the bark is very well drained so you can hardly overwater. Here is a list of seven orchid growing tips provided by the Alamo Orchid Society. The tips work well for Phalaenopsis orchids.

1. **Light:** Bright light from an east- or south-facing window is ideal. Avoid midday sun. Too much direct sunlight will burn an orchid; too little results in weak, dark green leaves and no flowers.
2. **Temperature:** Orchids are comfortable when you are. Perfect temperatures are 55-65 degrees at night and 70-85 degrees during the day.
3. **Water:** Water and then let the medium nearly dry. Use your finger to test the moisture. Plants in clay pots dry out more quickly than those in plastic. Growing medium, temperature and humidity also impact the watering schedule. Reduce watering when a plant is not in a growing cycle.
4. **Humidity:** Many orchids are native to tropical and subtropical areas with high humidity. To simulate those conditions, place the pot on a saucer full of moistened pebbles. Do not allow the bottom of the container to sit in water.
5. **Fertilize:** Orchids experts say, “Fertilize weakly, weekly.” Apply a diluted (1/4 strength) balanced fertilizer such as a 20-20-20 after each watering (don’t fertilize dry medium). Water without fertilizer once a month to leach accumulated salts.
6. **Grooming:** Cut spent flowers at the stem with clean, sharp scissors. Remove flower stems when they’ve dried up.
7. **Repotting:** Orchids grow better when their roots are pot bound, but repot when plants have obviously outgrown the container. Repot when the growing medium breaks down. Do no repot while plants are in bloom.

Other orchids that are relatively easy to grow are dendrobium, cattleyas, and oncidium orchids.

Cymbidium orchids are available in supermarkets every year. The blooms are attractive and last a long time but are difficult to get to rebloom.

It is time for the Orchid Society to sponsor its yearly sale and show. This year it is called Orchid Fandango and is being held at the Omni at the Colonnade. On Friday and Saturday, October 28th and 29th the show and sale runs from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM and on Sunday from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. In addition to exhibits from all over the world and lots of orchids for sale, there are a number of speakers. The Fandango will be a good place to get all your questions on orchids answered. There is a $5.00 fee for adults. Visit the Alamo Orchid website at [www.alamoorchidsociety.org](http://www.alamoorchidsociety.org) for more information.