

Tips for Re-blooming Orchids

by Karen S.
Rutgers Master Gardener
of Hunterdon County

You receive a beautiful flowering moth orchid, or purchase one for yourself, and after several months the blooms die and all you have left is a plant with green leaves and an old flower stem. What should you do with it now? My advice; do not throw it away or give it to a friend who likes plants--you can do this! These orchids are forgiving and once you understand their needs you will be rewarded with lovely blooms and your orchid will quickly become a valued friend for many, many years.



Phalaenopsis, or moth orchids, are featured here since they are one of the easiest orchids to grow and are readily available at box stores and supermarkets. Be sure to sterilize your cutting shears prior to making any cuts on an orchid. You can purchase a handy spray bottle with 91% isopropyl alcohol from a drug store.



Re-bloom from old flower stem

Not all Phalaenopsis orchids will re-bloom from an old stem due to genetics, but you can certainly try. After the last flower has faded and the stem is still green, cut the stem leaving two nodes (the notches on the stem) attached. One of these nodes may generate flowers in up to 12 weeks, but the flowers will be smaller than the first blooms. If the stem has turned brown, you should follow the instructions below.



Close up of flower stem with buds



Cut off old flower stem

An orchid will expend a lot of energy producing blooms, so by cutting off the flower stem near the crown you will provide your plant with a much needed rest. Moth orchids are at their best when they bloom just once a year.

Water

Although a popular idea, do not use ice cubes when watering your orchid. The freezing temperature does not make a tropical orchid a happy orchid. Instead, use tepid water regularly (once a week) and be sure not to let the roots to dry out between watering, but avoid overwatering. You may water from below by placing your potted orchid in a sterilized pot with water and allowing the plant to soak up the water. Or you may water from above by lightly spraying the orchid making sure not to soak the crown which is prone to rot.



Humidity

Boosting the humidity, especially during the winter, can be achieved by placing your orchid pot on pebbles in a tray of water; take care to keep the pot above the water—the pot should never sit in the water.

Fertilizer

Note: Do not fertilize the orchid during bloom, otherwise you may experience bloom loss. Commonly recommended fertilizer for the moth orchid is 20-20-20 NPK (20% Nitrogen, 20% Phosphorous, and 20% Potassium). Fertilizer should be used at half-strength. Follow the package directions by mixing the fertilizer with an equal amount of water, then dilute to half-strength with additional water.

Light

Never allow your moth orchid to be exposed to direct sunlight. Bright, indirect light from an east- or west-facing window works best.

Cool nights

Orchids enjoy cooler nights, about 60°F for about four weeks. The cooler night temperature should entice your orchid to re-bloom more readily.

