

When to Repot an Orchid

Unlike the stories repeated about orchids, they are not difficult to grow. In fact, they are about like any houseplant you may have. However, some varieties are easier to grow than others.

No plant family is more diverse than orchids. It is one of the largest group, with over 25,000 varieties around the world. They can thrive on trees or rocks, or in the potting medium you can purchase at your local nursery or big box store.

The **ideal location** for an orchid is in a south facing windowsill with sufficient light. If an orchid does not have enough light, the leaves will turn a dark, dull green color. A healthy orchid's leaves are a light to medium green. Insufficient light is the most common reason for an orchid not flowering. Orchids also love humidity. If you do not have a humid environment, a gravel tray placed under the plant and kept wet should provide enough humidity. A drop in nighttime temperature of 10 degrees will also encourage blooming. This can be achieved most often by placement by a window. Or, if placed outside in spring and summer, the evening temperature drop is sufficient.

When to re-pot: The Phalaenopsis in the photo on the next page has definitely gone past its repotting time. The plant shown is over three feet tall and three feet wide. The flowers on this orchid usually last 1-4 months, depending on conditions. This happens when the potting mix breaks down or the plant has outgrown its container. When the orchid starts to grow over the edge of the pot, it's time to re-pot. Usually this is every one or two years. However, some orchids can grow successfully for many years in the same pot.

The new pot should be one size larger than the old one. Fresh media should always be used for the repotting. Orchid mix potting soil usually consists of bark, peat moss, horticultural charcoal and perlite. Soil is not actually used for most orchids. The medium must be quick draining or root rot will quickly kill the plant. The pot used should have holes in the bottom or slits in the sides to encourage drainage.

It is important to be gentle pulling the plant from the pot from its container and it may even be necessary to break the pot if the plant's roots are excessively intertwined. While the plant is out of the container, clean away all old growing media and rinse the roots under tepid water. Trim off all dead roots, dead or yellowed foliage, and dead flower spikes. Replant the base, or crown of the orchid at the same level it was growing prior to repotting. Gently reposition into the new pot and add the new medium to support the orchid.

Nearly all repotting should be done between February and June. This is when most orchids are producing new growth and new roots. This occurs usually just after the plant flowers. Fertilize every other week with a balanced fertilizer of either 5-5-5 or 10-10-10. If you continue to have no blooms, using a bloom booster of 5-10-5 may produce desired blooms.

Resources:

University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service

American Orchid Society

