

## Home and Backyard Orchid Growing

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Growing 207 orchids indoors without a greenhouse is a lot of work but the benefits are no slugs, scale or aphids. I check every plant I get before bringing it into the population. Once a raffle plant had a mealybug, my hubby sealed it up in a plastic bag and filled it with carbon dioxide for 24 hours, goodbye bugs!



I have grow-lights in certain places to supplement natural light levels due to the changing angle of the sun throughout the year. Whatever I'm doing, it seems to be working. Most of my plants get 20-20-20 at half strength dilution. Cymbidiums get 30-10-10 mixed with Epsom salts at 1 tbsp/gal from April to July to initiate flower spikes. The phalaenopsis and dendrobiums get 6-30-30 every 6 weeks instead of 20-20-20. I have had them blooming for 8 months. Then some take a 3 month break and pop again. Every 4th watering all my plants get flushed with filtered water.

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The only orchids I have that grow outdoors are Cymbidiums in an eastern exposure and bare root Vandas hang from a Ligustrum bush during the year when temperatures are over 50 degrees, otherwise they board inside (with a few tree frogs). The bright but indirect light keeps them blooming, Vandas won't bloom if they don't enough light. Just watch for sunburn, the leaves will get bronze to red depending on their parentage.



I also use invisible mist humidifiers from Target (about \$30). They replace the humidity that a greenhouse provides but do not make the humidity so high that you have mold, ceiling rot or wallpaper peeling. These are life savers and the plants would actually say "thank you" if they could.

I had the filtered water tested and found the calcium level was 300 ppm – OUCH! I started using rainwater (when available) and distilled water - especially for the exotics (Masdevallias, Draculas, Vandas and other Cattleyas).

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I found out at the WOC in Miami that if you ask the same orchid culture question of 6 different vendors you will get at least 6 different answers. If your plant is not blooming, its needs are not being met. Change its location for more light. Don't be afraid to try something new.