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Orchids as Alternatives

Keep this holiday season interesting with orchids

With the holiday season in full swing, many homes are filled with rich, red poinsettias, delicate amaryllis and paperwhites, and plenty of evergreen boughs. And while I love to decorate with these seasonal must-haves, my winter decorating scheme just isn't complete without a few orchids! Orchids are among my favorite flowering houseplants—the way they infuse a space with style and elegance make them a welcome addition to my home.

With some 35,000 naturally occurring species from around the world, orchids are a vast and varied family of plants that is divided into four major groups based upon whether they grow in trees, on rocks, in decaying vegetation, or in sand. That's right, when it comes to soil, orchids really don't prefer it!

And if you're a beginner at growing orchids, I recommend that you start with a Phalaenopsis (fal-uh-nop-sis).

Also known as moth orchids, the Phalaenopsis produces robust sprays of butterfly shaped blooms in solid and variegated shades of pink, lavender, apricot, yellow and white. And when it comes to duration of blooms, orchids are always my top choice, as the arching stem is adorned with delicate blooms that last for several weeks and reliably re-bloom.

Moth orchids are also one of the easiest orchids to grow. It can take low-light conditions just fine, and as far as the temperature is concerned, if you're comfortable, Phalaenopsis orchids are too. Overwatering is one of the quickest ways to kill an orchid, but Just Add Ice orchids remove the worry and guesswork.

Simply place three cubes of ice in the container each week and you're done! This method won't harm the roots or leaves, but if there is any excess water left in the bottom of the decorative pot be sure and empty it, as orchid roots should not be left to sit in water.

Orchids are also light feeders—you only have to fertilize them with 25 percent of the recommended amount on a liquid fertilizer label, and they should only be fed every other week. Orchids do, however, dislike the salt buildup from fertilizer, so be certain to wash that out when you water. After the blooms fade, fertilizing should be reduced to once a month.

One of the things that I admire about orchids is that they are chameleons. An orchid can change its style according to its container or companion plants. Put an orchid in a silver cooler and it's perfect for a table at a formal dinner party. Place the same orchid in a simple glazed pot to decorate the kitchen or bath. An orchid will make any container stylish, and I mean any container.

Because they have been known as an unusual and exotic flower, orchids have gotten a reputation for being difficult and fussy. This is certainly not the case, and I hope you'll consider the beautiful blooms of the moth orchid both for year-round gift giving and for bringing a brilliant pop of color to your décor, whether its traditional, modern or somewhere in between!

I love giving potted orchids as gifts—they're already perfectly packaged and at most just need a bow or some ribbon. But if you want to incorporate orchids into a bigger gift-giving scheme, I've got just the plan.

I designed this holiday gift basket for a foodie friend of mine, and filled it with delicious treats. You can do the same or customize it to fit the recipients on your list!

Here's what you need:

- 1 CONTAINER**
(big enough to hold all of the items without being too crowded)
- SHREDDED TISSUE PAPER OR OTHER DECORATIVE FILLER**
- 1 JUST ADD ICE ORCHID**
- 1 LOAF OF FRESH BREAD**
- 1 JAR OF HOMEMADE PRESERVES**
- 1 RIBBON OR BOW**

Now, this gift couldn't be easier to put together. Fill the container, in this case a picnic basket, with enough shredded tissue paper to provide "lift" to the items you'll add next. Then place the orchid in a corner so that it's safe and secure. Place the bread and jar of preserves next. Add some ribbon or a bow to the handle or elsewhere on the outside of your container, and you're ready to go! And while the goodies in the basket won't last long, the orchid blooms will last at least a month.



The P. Allen Smith holiday orchid from Just Add Ice is available at Sam's Club, and features a festive decorative pot.