Phalaenopsis – a favorite for in-home growing

By Julia Horman

It’s not surprising that Phalaenopsis or “Moth Orchid” is so popular. Few other orchids are as easily grown in our homes and offer us blooms for months, especially in late winter.

With a little Care, you’ll enjoy your Phalaenopsis for years!

**Light** – Phalaenopsis do well in moderately bright light. They do not need direct sunlight. These orchids also grow well under Plant Grow Lights.

**Temperature** – Phals will be happy with a daytime range of 70 - 85°F and nighttime 62 - 68°F. A minimum 10°F nighttime drop in temperature for several weeks in the fall should help to trigger bloom.

**Humidity** – Orchids prefer 50% or higher humidity; if your house is very dry, grow your Phals on special humidity trays with rocks or a rack in the bottom to ensure that the orchid pot is not sitting in water.

**Watering** – In-home grown orchids seem to thrive on routine. A weekly watering/testing routine is a good start. The watering needs of individual orchids depend on pot size and planting medium – thus the ‘testing’ requirement. Weekly watering is fine for small to medium size pots, but larger pots, especially
> 8”, and any pots with a moss growing medium should be tested before watering. If a pot feels heavy and/or the medium is damp to the touch, watering can wait until the next week. Aim to water early in the day, using lukewarm water; avoid getting water in the leaf crown of Phalaenopsis. If possible, water orchids at a sink to allow a complete flushing of the pot and planting medium.

Remember that Phalaenopsis do not like to sit in water; make sure that their pots have good drainage. If the orchid is placed in a non-draining decorative pot, always remove the orchid before watering and let it drain thoroughly before replacing it in the non-draining pot.

**Fertilizing** – Potted orchids need feeding, especially while in active growth. Use a balanced (e.g., 10-10-10) made-for-orchids fertilizer every 2 weeks in summer, 3 weeks in spring and fall, 4 weeks in winter. You might consider a switch to the ‘bloom booster’ 10-15-10 formula for your fall feedings. Some orchid growers use a “weakly/weekly” method for fertilizing – if you choose this method, be alert to extra salt build-up in the potting medium, and thoroughly flush the medium from time to time.

**Re-potting** – Phalaenopsis are epiphytes (air plants) that grow in trees in their native habitats. The roots of a Phal need to breathe. The don’t like to be crammed into a pot. Repot your Phals every other year to keep them healthy. Special orchid potting mediums are available at on-line and at local nurseries. Re-potting can be a DIY project, or better yet, take advantage of the repotting services offered at FOBG’s annual Orchid Show & Sale. You will be able to obtain guidance from our expert potters and from the members of Rock Creek Orchid Club.

**After-bloom care of Phalaenopsis** – When the last bloom fades and drops off your orchid, cut back the flowering spike to about one inch. Continue your watering and feeding routine as the plant rests up for next year. After a few months, you should see a new leaf forming in the leaf crown; you may also notice some new roots developing at the base of the plant. The roots will be pale gray. It’s normal to have some roots growing above the planting medium.

In late fall, start watching for a new flowering spike – at first the spike may look like another root emerging, but soon you’ll notice that the spike is green, more pointed and upward growing than the new roots. Enjoy watching the spike developing over the next several months.