

# Dendrobium

from Carol Allen, the Orchid Lady

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## Dendrobium Culture

The Dendrobium family is a very large and diverse group that includes members that are evergreen, semi-evergreen, as well as those that lose their leaves with the change of the seasons. This sheet covers the Phalaenopsis or antelope type (tall, thin canes that flower in sprays from the top of the cane) and the nobile types (lose their leaves in the fall and have clusters of blooms that come directly from the canes).

### NUMBER ONE: Sunlight!

For growing and blooming Dendrobium Orchids in the Mid-Atlantic States, they need four to five hours of direct sun. A south or southeast facing window is perfect. Filtered (like through a sheer curtain) south or west will also work. You want to bathe the plant in very, very bright light/direct sun for at least half of the day. If you have low-e glass, south or west is preferred. The light should be bright enough on a sunny day to make you squint and cast a sharp shadow.

### NUMBER TWO: Proper watering

Make sure your orchid is in a pot with drain holes! Watering is a two-step technique. First you need to identify the type of potting medium and second you need to apply a sufficient quantity of water such that the potting medium is adequately moistened. The type of potting medium makes a tremendous difference in how often you water your orchid. Once a week no matter what is not correct!

Most Dendrobium Orchids found in stores today are potted in a coarse bark material that looks something like mulch. Watering every 5 – 7 days is good. Unfortunately in this type of medium it is very difficult to tell when it is wet or it is dry. You will have to remember when you

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watered last and while the medium is great for growing in the greenhouse, it is not so great for growing in the home.

Sometimes Dendrobium Orchids are potted in a combination of fine peat moss and bark chips. In this combination, when it is dry to the touch one half inch deep, it is time to water.

Rarely Dendrobium Orchids are potted in a golden, mossy substance. This is a species of tropical sphagnum moss and when an orchid is properly potted, it is nearly a perfect growing environment. However watering is a bit tricky. You must allow the top half-inch (in a 5" – 6" diameter pot) to go crunchy dry and I mean really, really crunchy dry. If there is any question about whether the moss is dry enough, wait another day before you water. The top of the moss will no longer be soft and in the typical home, ten to fourteen days will have gone by. ...and that's O.K.

When you water you want to water thoroughly and deeply. Take the potted orchid to the sink and allow a moderate stream of tepid water to run through the pot. Run the water around the entire surface of the medium. Continue to allow the water to run for a full minute by the clock. The pot will have gone from relatively light in weight to profoundly heavy. If in doubt, run more water into the potting medium. Allow to drain for a few minutes and then return it to the windowsill.

Nobile types like to run a bit dryer during the late fall and winter. Allow the pots to dry more between waterings. When flower buds start to emerge on the canes or when new shoots start to emerge from the crown, return to a more normal watering schedule.

### NUMBER THREE: Repotting!

...as soon as it is out of bloom it needs to be repotted! When you buy your new orchid the potting medium will have already composted and degraded. Orchids complicate matters further by being very sensitive to salt build up in the medium. The salts come from fertilizers and our regular tap water. Salts prevent normal root growth and will burn existing roots. For these reasons, it is imperative to repot your new orchid as soon as it is out of bloom. Thereafter, an annual repotting will keep it growing and blooming year after year.

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## A Few Other Details....

As orchids are generally very sensitive to salt build up, a little FERTILIZER will go a long way! Use an even numbered formula such as 7-7-7 or 10-10-10. Only fertilize when the plant is in active growth; when growing new leaves or growing a spike. During those times of growth, fertilize once per month. ...or as an alternative, apply a quarter strength dilution after every watering. Always apply the fertilizer solution after watering, never when the plant is dry.

A relative HUMIDITY of 50% - 60% is ideal. Good AIR MOVEMENT is essential if your humidity is extremely high. In the home this is less of a problem, but in the greenhouse, circulating fans should be used.

Mealybugs are sometimes a problem for Dendrobium Orchids. With most PESTS the first line of defense is always simple removal. A cotton ball or light finger pressure and a stream of warm water can be used to wipe any insects and their debris off of the leaves. A child's paintbrush can be used to remove any pests or debris in folds of the leaves. Use a horticultural or neem oil spray to smother the insects and their eggs. The same techniques can be used on scale insects if they become a problem. It is best to examine your plants on a regular basis as early detection and control is always more effective than trying to control a major infestation.

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