

Orchids

Orchids are arguably the most elegant of plants. Their flowers speak with poise and splendour, enough to melt any heart.

Two of the easier to grow orchid types stocked at Starke Ayres garden Centre are Cymbidiums and Phalaenopsis. Both varieties produce glamorous flower, with Phalaenopsis blooms lasting for months.

Cymbidiums are the easiest to grow of all orchids. Flowering in autumn, winter and spring, flowers last for up to six weeks.

They originate from the Himalayas and prefer a cooler environment compared to other orchids. They flourish underneath trees or under a pergola, in bright but dappled sunlight. They can be taken indoors temporarily while they are in bloom, brightening up one's house.

Phalaenopsis orchids are commonly called "Moth Orchids", referring to the likeness of the flowers to moths and butterflies. They produce flowers year-round and blooms last for up to six weeks as well.

They prefer a warmer environment and therefore need to be grown indoors in bright light, but not direct, sunlight. Try to avoid placing them in draughts or nearby a heater. It is important to maintain humidity, so place the orchid container onto a saucer filled with stones and water. The stones will prevent the container from sitting in the water, thereby avoiding root rot.

Cymbidiums and **Phalaenopsis** are epiphytes. This means they naturally grow on trees, above the forest floor. They have sponge-like roots that absorb the water they need from rain passing over the roots. In a home or garden, however, orchids need to be watered frequently, making sure there is good drainage so the roots do not sit in water.

Feed orchids with one of the Chemicult Orchid Nutrient Mixtures – check on the packaging for the time of year. Dilute half a teaspoon to five litres of water and water every 10-14 days. Other houseplant foods can be added but at half the recommended dosage. Phalaenopsis are not heavy feeders. Fertilizer should be added to the water every two weeks for Cymbidiums and monthly for Phalaenopsis.

Healthy orchids are able to cope better with pest invasions from soft brown scale, mealy bug or snails. Visible pests can be wiped off with alcohol. The more tenacious specimens that can't be easily seen can be sprayed with Pyrethrin insecticides such as Kombat Fruit Fly and Kombat Ants which decompose after a couple of weeks. Snails tend to hide out in the potting-bark mixture so submerge the container into a bucket of water if they become a problem. They will rise to the top as the air pockets in the bark mixture disappear. After about an hour, remove the pot from the water and allow it to drain.

Visit Starke Ayres Garden Centre to stock up on beautiful orchid specimens.

