

How to Grow and Care for Dendrobium Orchids

Dendrobium Orchid Flower Care

By: R. Renée Bembry

Native to eastern and southeastern Asia, Dendrobium Orchids are flowering tropical plants, usually grown as houseplants or in greenhouses. Dendrobium Orchids come in a variety of colors and sizes and make great starter plants for novice or beginner orchid growers.

Dendrobium orchid flowers grow in clusters called “sprays” along well-ripened branches. The plants produce smooth leathery petals with intricate designs and varying colored patterns.

A single Dendrobium orchid plant can generate hundreds of three-inch flowers. Well-maintained plants are capable of holding their blossoms for as many as two full months. This guide to caring for and maintaining Dendrobium orchids will help plant lovers successfully grow and enjoy these Asian wonders.

Although growing Dendrobium orchids in greenhouses is easier than growing them in the home, these orchids make great flowering houseplants when growers meet their main growing requirements. A bit of strategic placement and in some cases rearranging to different areas of the home may be necessary at times, however, successfully bringing Dendrobium orchids to bloom is worth the extra effort.

Provide Sufficient Lighting to Promote Growth

Granted greenhouses are not being used, the first thing

Dendrobium orchid growers should consider is where in the home to place the plants. Dendrobium orchids need plenty of light but not too much direct sunshine. Although overhead lighting can aid Dendrobium lighting needs it is best to provide these plants a source of outdoor lighting as well.

Whenever possible, situate Dendrobium orchid houseplants where they can receive filtered sunlight. South or west windows usually work best at providing sufficient lighting and preventing overheating. When choosing to set plants in windows with direct sunlight, use sheer curtains or other shading devices to reduce sun exposure especially during hot midday afternoons.

Dendrobium orchid leaves should range from light green to deep green. The leaves should be stout, plump, and despite their curviness, they should be erect as opposed to hanging or leaning. Soft dark leaves indicate plant lighting is insufficient. Provide more overhead lighting or move plants to brighter locations as necessary. Just remember to avoid too much direct sunlight.

Humidity Levels Best for Dendrobium Orchids

Dendrobium orchids thrive on humidity and love weather conditions that consist of relative humidity levels reaching at least fifty percent of their surrounding temperatures. Indoor growers can aid these conditions by misting plants with handheld water sprayers, using plant humidity trays, or using household humidifiers.

Misting plants provides temporary increases in humidity levels. Misting is frowned on as a permanent method for increasing houseplant humidity, however, because misting may promote plant fungal growth. In addition, misting tends to leave water spots on houseplant leaves.

Utilizing trays to increase humidity levels around plants provides longer term humidity increases. This method involves

setting plants on trays of wet pebbles. When using this method, growers must take care not to allow roots to sit in pebbled trays of water.

Humidifier use may be the best method to provide sufficient levels of humidity for Dendrobium orchids. Growers can use humidifiers that attach to home heating systems or growers may opt for smaller humidifiers and sit them near their plants.

How Hot to Keep Dendrobium Temperature Levels

Dendrobium orchids like their living environments to be warm. They prefer nighttime temperatures to linger around 60 degrees Fahrenheit. During the daytime, Dendrobium orchids can tolerate temperatures as low as 10 degrees Fahrenheit but still prefer temperatures on the warmer side. Sunlight and sufficient humidity levels helps Dendrobium orchids endure cooler daytime temperatures.

Know When and How Much Water to Provide

Although watering Dendrobium orchids as you would most houseplants by allowing their soil to dry prior to subsequent watering suffices as proper watering procedures, Dendrobium orchids can go for longer periods between watering than many other houseplants.

Growers need not worry too much about letting Dendrobium orchids dry out because Dendrobium orchids are *epiphytes with pseudobulbs*. What this means is that in their natural habitats, epiphytes grow on trees and use their pseudobulbs to store food and water. This storage allows plants to live for long periods without rain and makes them capable of surviving droughts.

Sticking an index finger about an inch deep into Dendrobium orchid pots to feel for moisture is the best way to prevent over watering and to determine if plants can use a watering. Index finger testing is more efficient than relying on how wet

or dry plants look or feel at surface levels.

At watering time, it is best to saturate plants by pouring enough water for it to exit the holes at the bottoms of the pots. This is the only way to ensure roots get as much water as they need prior to continuing the wet dry watering cycle.

Stem Support Keeps Branches Upright

Dendrobium orchid stems usually require support once they become so tall they begin to lean. To keep the stems growing tall and straight, support stems with 18-inch stakes or rods. Push stakes or rods into the soil next to stems until stakes or rods are stable. Use plant tiebacks or clamps to hold stems to stakes. Staking when plants are small is the best way to prevent disturbing or puncturing roots.

When to Re-pot Older Dendrobium Orchids

Re-pot Dendrobium orchids every two to three years when roots venture through holes in pot bottoms. For best results, use orchid bark or fir bark made specifically for orchids when re-potting – especially for larger plants. Orchids need plenty of air and bark allows roots more “breathing space” than fine soil mixes. Using finer mixes for seedlings and other small plants that need compact soil to cling to is fine as long as the soil has good drainage.

Providing proper orchid care and maintenance for Dendrobium orchids rewards growers with beautiful plants that last for years and produce more flowers as they age. Growers can become so successful before they know it they will be sharing their thriving plants with family and friends.