

GROWING ORCHIDS IN FLORIDA

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Orchids are very popular plants. Once only available to the wealthy, through technology changes and the advent of new propagation methods, orchids are now within reach for most gardeners. Propagated for retail trade, orchids are almost entirely by tissue culture.

The following six orchid species and hybrids are recommended to Florida residents because of their adaptability, ease of growing and beautiful flowers:

Cattleya is the most popular and widely grown probably because of their attractive showy flowers and long life. Often called the “corsage” orchid, flower colors include all of the basic colors (except blue), either singly or in various combinations, and intensities ranging from bold to pastel shades. Some will even have a pleasant fragrance, not common in all orchids. Certain cultivars produce up to 20 three-inch flowers, whereas others yield seven-inch flowers in clusters of four or five. Cattleyas generally flower once a year, usually during the spring or fall, with flowers lasting about six weeks.



Phalaenopsis is often recommended for novice orchid growers as it can endure less than perfect growing conditions, making it an excellent orchid for Florida gardeners.

Producing long arching sprays (10-20 flowers from 3-4 inches in diameter) of white, pink, yellow, orange, peppermint striped and two-toned flowers resemble moths in flight. It flowers in winter and early spring, and may last for more than one month; nearly continuous flowering may be induced with good culture and pruning of the old flower spikes. If you’ve ever been to Hawaii, you may have fallen in love with this flower there.

Dendrobium is a large and diverse genus with many species and hybrids, with flowers often seen in corsages. It is popular because of its ease of culture and prolific flowering habits. It flowers in the fall and winter (white, lavender and combination



colored flowers), which open gradually, and may remain open for 3-4 weeks. These usually flower twice per year.

Oncidium are considered easy to grow, producing nearly year-round blooms on easy to care plants. A profusion of smallish yellow and brown or white and brown “dancing lady” flowers appear at various times of the year. As a general rule, *Oncidium*s are rugged orchids and will flower even under adverse growing conditions, but more flowers will be produced when they are given proper care.



Vanda produce sturdy bloom spikes of a dozen or more flowers in the warm months. This Philippine native produces flowers that vary in size from 2-4 inches across and in color from white to variegated patterns of brown, green, and pink to blue and purple. There are even black Vanda orchids. Each flower spike will produce between 3-12 flowers that last three weeks or more, depending upon conditions. Shown is a Vanda orchid lei.



Epidendrum is among the easiest and most prolific orchid. Delicate flowers are produced on long stems and make excellent outdoor garden plants. One-inch pastel flowers are produced in profusion most of the year. Flower spikes generally remain on the plant even after the flowers are gone. Cut them off and wait a month or two for another burst of color. Sometimes the Epidendrum will also produce a baby plant on the spike called a Keiki. Epidendrum orchids are also seen natively throughout Florida. Look for them growing on tree branches.

Paphiopedilum orchids (also known as slipper orchids) are gorgeous, but at this time there is no reliable way to propagate these intensely colored beauties. If you need to have one, don’t be surprised to pay between \$100 and \$500 per specimen.



Repotting – *Cattleyas*, *Oncidiums*, *Dendrobiums* and *Epidendrums* in particular need to be repotted every 2-3 years as the medium decomposes or when new growth extends over the edge of the container. *Phalaenopsis* and *Vanda* require potting less often because of their single-stem growth habit. Repotting can be done by transplanting to a larger pot or by division.

Watering – saturate each pot so that moisture drains from the bottom of the pot, and then do not water again until the surface of the medium becomes dry.

Light – most orchids prefer partial shade (70-80% shade) for optimum growth and flowering. *Phalaenopsis*, however, thrives in deeper shade; its leaves burn easily, so shade should be provided at all times. *Epidendrums* tolerate full sun and can be planted in open beds outdoors.

Temperature – orchids need to be protected from cold temperatures; any night below 50° requires some protection. Most orchids prefer night temperatures of between 60°-70°, with warmer days.

For a real treat, visit a local orchid display to see all the wonderful colors and flower types. Marie Selby Gardens in Sarasota is one place you would not want to miss if you are an orchid hunter. For more information on Marie Selby, check out their website at www.selby.org.

For more information on growing orchids in Florida, a number of great resources, including tips on potting media, propagation, fertilization, insects and diseases, visit the University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service Website <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP017>