

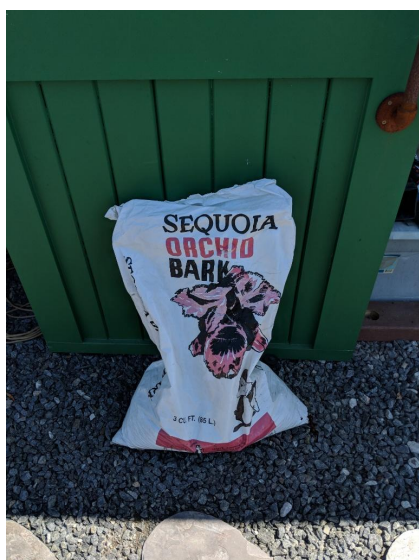
There are species and cultivars of orchids that occur at nearly all latitudes -- from the tropics to arctic regions. This is a method for tropical orchids grown indoors in non-tropical regions. By many standards it is labor intensive -- and intended for those who are **CRAZED** to get the most out of their plants. There are simpler approaches (monthly) for those happy with smaller flower displays, and of course other methods I'm unaware of that might achieve the same or better results. So think of it as a report of my current methodology.

**[1.]** It is important for novices to understand that the volume of blooms is dependent on age and size of the plant in addition to health and nutrients. A young well-cared for plant might produce a dozen or so blossoms (depending on species) but under great care a 10+ year-old orchid could put a hundred blooms on display.

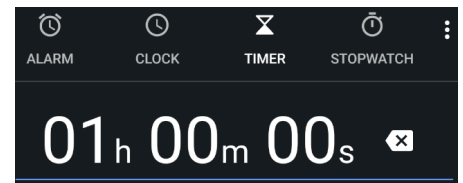
**[2.]** I plant my tropical orchids in straight ¼ inch orchid bark. On occasion I've received orchids growing in peat moss, etc. -- but I remove it all, rinse with lukewarm water, and replant. Depending on your location and choice of venues, orchid bark can be inexpensive or outrageously priced. I purchase it in 3 cubic foot bags from a local wholesale supplier (Crop Production Services). The bark not only supplies a natural substrate for orchid growth, but also (when soaked) a source of humidity in the otherwise arid environment of homes. I caution against using perlite etc. because it is an expanded clay and completely foreign to tropical orchids.

The container you use must have drainage. I happen to use 2 and 4 gallon black plastic nursery pots because they are well suited for the job. If you don't like the appearance of these then after each watering you can place your inner pot with drainage into an outer pot with acceptable appearance. I have given up on the latter and instead place the containers in black plastic nursery trays lined with foil.

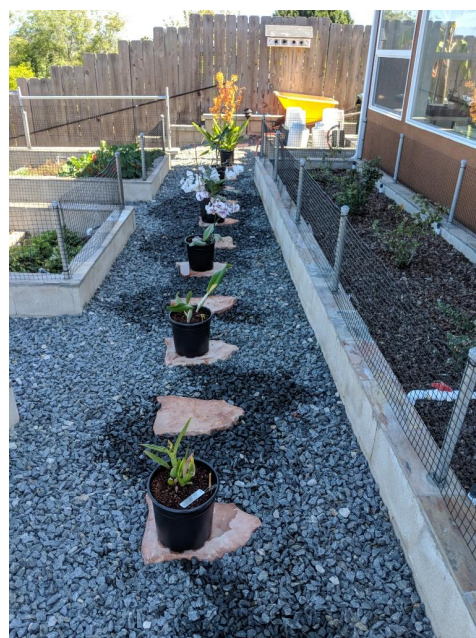
Location of the plants is important. East facing windows have long worked well for me. The plants seem to prosper from the rising sun and the relief in the afternoon. Southern facing windows can work but some set-back is required to avoid frying your plants. In my opinion west and north should be avoided along with skylights, tiny bathroom windows and so on. My room temperature ranges from 65° to 75°F.



**[3.]** My orchid containers are soaked weekly to provide water to the plants and more importantly to recharge the bark with moisture. I line up a set of 3 and 5 gallon pails that are large enough to accept my plant containers. Persons in colder climates must do this indoors when outdoor temps are below 65°. I first add fertilizer (see #7 below), then add water, and finally put the plants in to soak. Adding the fertilizer first insures it will be well-mixed with the water. The water level in the pails is important because you want enough to “soak up” to the top of the containers without expelling bark out the top. That'll take some practice. Finally, set a timer or alarm for a one hour soak.



**[4.]** After soaking the containers must be allowed to drain for 30 to 60 minutes -- to the point of only a few drips per hour. Tropical orchids do well with regulated moisture but not sitting in water for hours or days.





[5.] After draining is complete, return the containers to their trays or non-draining pots but avoid letting them sit in water.



[6.] Nearly all tropical orchids have flower spikes that naturally crawl along the ground or hang out of trees. If you want your blossoms vertical you'll need to stake them. Tiny little stakes will work in year-old orchids but otherwise if you've been following this method you'll need something sturdier -- and they won't hold up (balance) in containers smaller than 2 gallons. I purchase run-of-the-mill 4 foot bamboo garden stakes and cut them to length if necessary. I attach the flower spikes to them at low, medium, and high locations with twist ties and (in some cases) zip ties. To keep the stakes vertical, I drill holes in the pots and secure them with zip ties.



[7.] Here is my weekly orchid fertilizer schedule, independent of months. Although the brand I use is Grow More, the formulas are also available from other manufacturers. All dosages are per gallon of soaking water.

- Week 1. 1/8th teaspoon Grow More 20-10-20 orchid food per gallon.
- Week 2. 1/8th teaspoon Grow More 5-50-17 Hawaiian Bud & Bloom per gallon.
- Week 3. 1/8th teaspoon Grow More 20-10-20 orchid food per gallon.
- Week 4. 1/2 teaspoon Grow More Jump Start per gallon.

