



St. Augustine Orchid Society

www.staugorchidsociety.org

Orchids in Spring

April 2002

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

Spring is one of the busiest times of the year for orchid growers. Many genera are beginning their growth cycles with new leaves and roots, while Spring Cattleyas and Phals are in full bloom. In addition, those that have harbored their orchids in windowsills and bathrooms are ready to move them outside and reclaim their living space. Be careful not to shock your orchids with sudden increases in light or dramatic changes in temperature. Spring may have sprung, but nights can still be cold.

Phalaenopsis begin to put out new roots, even while bearing flowers, when day length reaches 12 hours and temperatures are warm. A decline in night temperature caused by moving them outside or turning off the heat in the greenhouse can induce Phals to stop growing and spike again. This can lead to long spikes with a few flowers, with the corresponding cessation of growth. Summer blooming Phals exposed to cool conditions may abort both flowering and growth as they come from climates that are warm all year long.

Spring is an excellent time to repot because most orchids are in a growth mode, quickly replacing roots lost during repotting. Another reason is that media can sour or degrade in winter when gloomy days and low temperature allows media to stay wet and turn mushy. This is especially true for soil-less mixes and even for dense media containing a high proportion of fine bark. Paphs and Phals are especially susceptible, as they do not like to have their roots dry completely, so are more likely to be over watered. For these two genera, more frequent repotting is better than waiting too long. Other genera typically potted in coarse media that is allowed to dry thoroughly between watering will usually grow out of the pot before requiring repotting.

Vandas are generally considered warm growing, even though they tolerate cool conditions in winter. Their growth comes largely when temperature is high and nights warm. If they cool down too much each night, Vandas will often cease both root growth and the production of new leaves. Avoid prematurely placing them outside. Wait until night temperature is 60 degrees F or higher.

Most of us leave flowers on plants as long as possible for maximum enjoyment. If, however, an orchid has been weakened by losing part of its root system or by having dealt with disease or pests, removing flowers early can enhance growth and perhaps the survival of the plant. Flowers will not last as long, but removing them will prevent a tremendous drain of energy from the plant and lead to new growth. Each year mites cause damage, especially on thin-leaved Dendrobiums and similar-leaved orchids in my collection. By the time they are recognized in May the damage is done. This pest thrives on low humidity and can be prevented simply by keeping humidity high. If this is not feasible, a light spray of oil (Ultra-fine or Sun-oil) on the leaf, especially the underside, will limit the damage. Be sure to apply oils (and all pesticides) when leaves are cool. Leaves should be dry before they are exposed to bright light.



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This year several Phals in my collection had cold water dripping into the crown each night, a sure way to develop crown rot. Not a single case developed on these or any other Phal in my collection during the past growing season despite not using any fungicide or bactericide. The only cases occurred on three newly purchased Phals. I have long believed that genetically weak plants and plants that have deficiencies in certain nutrients get rots. Avoiding excess nitrogen fertilizer, excess micronutrients, and providing more Potassium, Calcium and Magnesium is the key. If rots plague your Phal collection cut back on nitrogen and phosphorus and grow a year. Your plants will not grow as fast, but there will also be fewer rot problems.