



## Getting Your Orchids Ready for Your Vacation June 2013

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Leaving on vacation always involves some extra work in the greenhouse, even if it just a short vacation. Even under-lights growers must prepare their orchids and growing area. The good news is that orchids handle being left alone just fine, with just a few exceptions. My rule of thumb is that leaving more than 7-8 days requires someone to check in or to water some of the more sensitive orchids in the collection, but leaving less than a week is OK with just a few precautions. In nature, orchids frequently go through dry periods, so a little drying is not generally a concern for most orchids that are well established. However, orchids with fine roots that lack pseudobulbs or small seedlings need some special treatment before you leave.



The evening before leaving soak all orchids with just water, no fertilizer. Early the next morning soak all the collection thoroughly again with just water. I then spray all orchids, including side walls and floor of the greenhouse with a general fungicide. The objective is to allow orchids to be well hydrated when you leave and to eliminate bacterial and fungal spores that may cause problems should the weather be moist and humid. Orchids that are vulnerable to drying are placed in very shady locations or under benches. This group includes those mounted. As long as there is good air circulation there are rarely rot problems. This time, I had some seedlings just out of flask. They were placed under a bench and the entire flat was set into a shallow pan and  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of rainwater was added to the pan to provide humidity to the new seedlings and also to allow some water to wick up into



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the medium. When I returned after eight days, the water was gone, but the medium was still damp and the seedlings starting to put out new roots.

Newly repotted orchids with pseudobulbs will often respond to a dry period with a flush of roots. Traditionally, orchid nurseries would confine newly repotted orchids to a separate bench or greenhouse and withhold water until new roots appeared. This provided good roots for the future as well as limited rots that often develop when damaged roots and rhizomes are allowed to stay moist after repotting.

For windowsill growers, leaving your orchids for an extended period of time leads to the same problems, although rots are seldom an issue. If you are growing under lights or the heat/air conditioner is running while you are gone, drying can be far worse than in the greenhouse. Some growers who use high intensity lights in basements or dark rooms simply turn off lights. While that may limit the drying problem the lack of light can confuse your orchids who rely on day length to stimulate growth and flowering. A few 60 w bulbs on a timer can solve this problem. It is also recommended that the thermostat be changed to limit the time heat or air conditioning will be delivered.

The biggest potential problem is a power failure when it is hot and the greenhouse is closed in summer. A similar problem with freezing can occur if there is a power failure in winter. This is a problem that can lead to the loss of an entire collection. Every greenhouse should have a backup system that works automatically when you are away.