

**Orchid Care: For  
The Beginner**  
*2019 Full Color Edition*

Barb Schmidt

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- Lc Angel Heart Himimanu
- L Tenebrosa
- Slc Jewel Box Scheherazade
- Phal Surf Song

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## Preface

I would first like to say a heartfelt "Thank You!" to anyone reading this who also purchased the 2015 edition of this book. My goal was to create a book for beginner orchid enthusiasts that would be easy to read and would provide the basic information needed to keep orchids alive and get them to bloom again. I wanted to take away some of the dread that comes with buying your first orchid. Orchids should be a relaxing and fun hobby! I intentionally kept this book informal and at a short enough length that the average reader could read it from cover to cover.

However, to do this, I had to make some generalizations. With almost 30,000 different species, there are probably more exceptions than rules when it comes to orchids. First, I felt that when you buy your first orchid, you will probably buy one of the more common genera. So, this book covers the orchid genera found most often for sale at orchid growers and orchid shows. Second, I made the assumption that beginner orchid collectors are not really interested in a lot of technical information about the plant; you just want to know how to keep it growing and blooming.

Since *Orchid Care: For the Beginner* was published in 2015, I have, however, received many requests for a follow-up book. I am currently working on my second book, *Orchid Care: For the Experienced Grower*. This book will provide more details on orchid physiology and care, more orchid genera, and information on specific topics, such as:

- ❖ why orchids may grow but not bloom
- ❖ when to cut off a Phalaenopsis bud spike
- ❖ how to mount an orchid on bark
- ❖ how to grow native orchids outdoors

I have learned quite a bit about orchids in the ensuing four years since my first book came out. I became involved with the American Orchid Society and am now the Vice-Chair of their Education Committee. I now also regularly teach orchid classes throughout the United States. Because of these experiences, I made a few minor editorial changes to this book.

I have also learned quite a bit more about publishing. First and foremost, you will notice that I can now publish all of my orchid photos in glorious color! In 2015, it was prohibitively expensive to include color photos in a published book. I hope you enjoy this 2019 edition of *Orchid Care: For the Beginner*.



## Introduction

I had always admired orchids from afar. Like most people, I assumed orchid plants were the delicate, prima donnas of the plant world. Orchids were mysterious plants with exotic blooms that looked like moths or spiders and had strange names like *Phalaenopsis* and *Paphiopedilum*. I was awed by their fragile beauty and convinced that buying one would sentence it to certain death. Finally, about twelve years ago, I was entranced by the beautiful displays of flowers around me at the Philadelphia International Flower Show and decided to take the plunge. I bought my first orchid plant.

It took me several frustrating years of trial and error to figure out that raising orchids is really not rocket science. Despite any preconceptions you may have, orchids are actually fairly easy to grow once you figure out what they like. Orchid care is not difficult, it is just different from the usual house plant care. It took me almost two years to figure this out.

During those years, I tried researching orchid care and could not find anything that addressed the questions that a neophyte orchid enthusiast would have in terms that made sense. I needed basic, simple information that told me how to make my orchid happy in its new home. I talked to growers and attended orchid classes until I found what worked. Since then, I have had several friends visit my

home and ask me for help starting their own orchid collections. I have also been asked to teach orchid classes for the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society, New York Botanical Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, and U.S. Botanic Gardens. That is what prompted me to write this book.

I should emphasize that this book is intended for the *beginner* orchid collector. It summarizes what I have learned about raising orchids. I have found that caring for orchids is mostly common sense. Once you know what these plants like when they are growing in the wild, you just have to try to replicate that in your home as best you can. That is why, throughout this book, I will talk about the native conditions for each orchid genus. Also, orchid collecting should be fun, not a chore. I try to present simple, easy ways to raise healthy orchids that bloom consistently.

I now have over two dozen orchids in my home and ten different genera. I usually have five to ten orchids blooming at any one time. Five years ago, I came full circle and entered one of my orchids in the Philadelphia Flower Show Novice Orchid Class. I won a first place ribbon. A year later, the same orchid received an Honorable Mention in the Phalaenopsis Orchid Class. I have entered several orchids since then and won additional ribbons. It is at this point that I should mention that orchid collecting is contagious. My daughter started her own orchid collection and entered two of her orchids in the Novice Class. They won first and second place.

The purpose of this book is to make orchids accessible to anyone. If you follow the orchid care instructions in this

book, you should be able to not only keep an orchid plant alive, but get it to bloom over and over again. I intentionally kept this book short enough to be read from cover to cover; and, I would recommend doing so as I mention various orchid care tips throughout the book. However, *Orchid Care: For the Beginner* can also be used as a reference tool. There are chapters on specific areas of orchid care and tables at the end of the book that summarize information presented in the chapters. I also include a glossary of some of the more common orchid terms that you may not be familiar with.

The key to being successful at raising orchids is to mimic their natural conditions as best as possible without driving yourself crazy. If you meet their basic needs, most of the common household genera will adapt.





## **Orchidaceae - The Orchid Family**

All orchids belong to the Orchid Family, Orchidaceae. There are approximately 880 genera and approaching 30,000 identified species of orchids in this family. New species are being identified all the time; and some botanists estimate that there may actually be as many as 50,000 different species out there. That is why orchid collecting becomes addicting – so many choices, so little time.

Proving my point that orchids are not the delicate flowers we assume they are, the orchid family has been around since the dinosaurs. Genetic sequencing shows that orchids may have arisen in the Late Cretaceous, around 76 to 84 million years ago or more. Orchidaceae holds the title of being one of the two largest families of flowering plants, with Asteraceae (daisies, asters and sunflowers) being the other. Orchidaceae is also considered to be the most evolved plant family, having each of its species adapted to its specific pollinator.

Orchid genera span the globe. While the majority of orchids grow naturally in tropical areas (approximately 760 genera), some genera are found above the Arctic Circle and on islands in the southwest Pacific between Australia and Antarctica. North America is home to 20 to 26 native genera; and temperate Asia and Europe have 40 to 60 genera. Oceania accounts for the other 50 to 70 genera.

The Vanilla orchid genus also produces a valuable food source, vanilla extract. *Vanilla planifolia* is native to Mexico, but cultivated in locations such as Madagascar, Indonesia, Hawaii, and Tahiti. The seed pods from this plant are used to make vanilla flavoring.

Some of the more common household orchid genera are:

- ❖ *Brassolaeliocattleya* – an orchid hybrid that includes parentage from three different genera: *Brassavola*, *Cattleya* and *Laelia*
- ❖ *Cattleya* - the corsage orchid with a large showy lip
- ❖ *Cymbidium* – a waxier orchid, known as the boat orchid
- ❖ *Dendrobium* – the spray orchid, because it is found in flower arrangements
- ❖ *Miltonia* - the pansy orchid
- ❖ *Oncidium* – the dancing lady orchid
- ❖ *Paphiopedilum* – the lady's slipper orchid
- ❖ *Phalaenopsis* – the moth orchid
- ❖ *Vanda* – a large flower in vibrant colors

I include a table at the end of this book that summarizes some of the characteristics of each of these orchid species.