

Orchids at home

In the December 2009 issue of *The Garden*, Sarah Brooks introduced some of the best orchids for growing at home. Here Liz Johnson from McBeans Orchids suggests a few more that will grow and flower happily in household conditions ➡



A warm, light bathroom can be a good home for orchids

TIM SANDALL



MIKE SLEIGH / RHS

CYMBIDIUM

Elegant and popular orchids in a range of colours and sizes, producing long-lasting sprays of flowers above long, strappy foliage between November and April.

Ease of care: Easy to keep in cool conditions.

Flower colours: Most except blue and purple.

Light: Cymbidiums need good, strong light, even some direct sun in winter

Growing conditions: Plants like daytime temperatures around 16°C (61°F), nights down to 10°C (50°F). They do tolerate a wider range, but will not flower as well. The key to achieving optimum flowering is to ensure these lower night temperatures during the summer: ideally a differential of about 8°C for a couple of weeks. This can be done by placing plants outside in dappled shade. Remember to bring them back indoors before the frosts, taking care to acclimatise gradually. Grow indoors on a moist gravel tray to raise humidity and prevent leaf-tip browning.

Cultivation: Grow in free draining orchid compost, repotting every two to three years after flowering, when potbound. Water thoroughly when compost is almost dry and then allow to drain well. Feed plants with a balanced orchid fertiliser from late spring to early autumn and one with increased potash during winter.



MCBEANS ORCHIDS

ZYGOPETALUM

These unusual looking orchids are known for producing flowers with their fragrance and often striking colouring.

Ease of care: A good orchid for beginners.

Flower colours: Green, mauve and mocha.

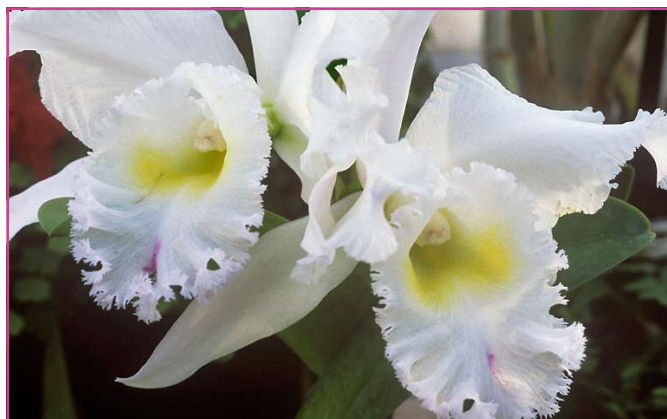
Light: Bright but indirect sunlight.

Growing conditions: Although tolerant, these orchids grow best in daytime temperatures around 17–25°C (63–77°F) with nights not below 13°C (55°F). However they can take temperatures up to 35°C (95°F) as well as lower ones for short periods, surviving brief spells with night temperatures just above freezing provided day temperatures are rather warmer. They like moderate humidity: stand them in a gravel tray.

Cultivation: Grow plants in sphagnum moss mixed with a little perlite and bark (repotting every year) or in a medium bark mix. Water them freely when in growth, less frequently in the winter, but never letting the compost dry out completely. Feed with a balanced orchid fertiliser from late spring to early autumn and one with increased potash during the winter.

The main flowering period is usually late spring, but when grown well, may produce a second flush of flowers in autumn.

More easy-care
orchids on next page ➔



CLAY PERRY / RHS

CATTLEYA

Spectacular in flower, these orchids are available in a vast range of colours, shapes and forms. The smaller, 'mini-cattleya' make a more suitable house plant than the larger flowered selections, which can be ungainly out of bloom.

Ease of care: *Cattleya* are not for beginners but are straightforward if their needs are met.

Flower colours: All colours but blue.

Light: *Cattleya* require good light levels but must be kept shaded from direct mid day sun.

Growing conditions: These orchids need between 50–80 percent humidity so stand on a pebble tray and mist spray daily. Good air circulation is essential. They prefer night temperatures above 13°C (55°F) and day temperatures of 20°C (68°F) or more. This differential is important for flowering, particularly for mature plants. Water should always be at room temperature. Feed plants with balanced orchid fertiliser from late spring to early autumn and one with increased potash during the winter.

Cultivation: Repot mature plants every two to three years in spring when new growth is beginning. Grow them in medium-coarse orchid compost to enable the roots to dry out between watering. Mature plants would benefit from a coarser medium than young plants.



GRAHAM TITCHMARSH / RHS

PLEIONE

Known as Indian crocus, these are small, attractive plants with large flowers for a cool windowsill. Plants grow annually from small 'pseudobulbs'; each produces usually one (sometimes more) pleated leaf expanding fully after the flowers fade.

Ease of care: Straightforward provided the correct cultivation is followed.

Flower colours: White, pink, purple or yellow.

Light: These plants like bright, indirect sunlight while in growth.

Growing conditions: Keep plants at 13–23°C (55–73°F) during the growing season; many are near-hardy and can be kept just frost-free in winter, as long as the compost is dry.

Cultivation: Grow in a small pot or pan in free-draining compost of sphagnum moss, fine bark and perlite. Repot the plants annually in early spring. One third of the 'bulb' should be above compost. Space them about 2cm (3/4in) apart. While in flower water sparingly then freely while leaves and roots are growing.

In autumn, reduce water once the leaves begin to yellow and allow for a complete rest after they fall, keeping compost dry.

More easy-care orchids on next page ➔



BARREY PHILLIPS / RHS

ODONTOGLOSSUM

Appealing and widely offered orchids with tall sprays of colourful flowers held above lance-shaped foliage. The easier-to-grow intergeneric hybrids come in a wide range of colours.

Ease of care: This group of orchids requires a little more attention than most others grown as houseplants. The intergeneric hybrids prove the most resilient.

Light: These plants like bright, indirect sunlight.

Flower colours: *Odontoglossum* and related hybrids come in a vast range of flower colours except blue; many feature attractively contrasting spots or blotches.

Growing conditions: These orchids are generally cool growing, preferring day temperatures of 13–23°C (55–73°F) with nights above 10°C (50°F). Keep plants on pebble trays to maintain good humidity levels.

Cultivation: Grow these plants in a sphagnum moss mix and never allow them to fully to dry out, repotting annually. Water plants, if possible, with rainwater and feed with half strength orchid fertiliser from late spring to early autumn, and one with increased potash in winter. The main flowering season is late winter to spring.



MCBEANS ORCHIDS

MASDEVALLIA

These orchids are usually small with fleshy, lance-shaped leaves producing unusual looking tricorn shaped flowers with 'tails' to the sepals. Most of the hybrids prove extremely floriferous but take up little space, flowering from spring to early summer.

Ease of care: Straightforward to grow.

Flower colours: Usually shades of pink, purple, orange or white.

Light: These orchids grow best in partial shade.

Growing conditions: Keep plants at 13–23°C (55–73°F), in an airy yet humid environment, best achieved by standing plants on pebble filled trays.

Cultivation: Grow these orchids in a sphagnum moss mix which should not be allowed to dry out. Water freely in growth, reducing in winter, keeping them just moist. Repot plants annually. Feed with a balanced orchid fertiliser from late spring to early autumn and one with increased potash in winter.



Liz Johnson is the author of *Simple Steps to Success: Orchids*, published by the RHS and Dorling Kindersley, 144pp, March 2010, ISBN 9781405348843, RRP £6.99