

The Basics of Orchids Repotting Techniques

Orchids are gorgeous and exotic flowers and keeping them for years of bloom is not difficult if the correct orchids repotting techniques and equipment are used. There are orchid supply sites on line and lots of information to be found with a simple search.

Each species of orchid will have its special needs, so ascertaining which particular variety you have is the first step. The potting medium, the type of pot, and the best time to move a plant to a larger container may vary with the type of plant. Supply houses have special growing mixes for each variety, sorted by species name for easy ordering.

Pots that may be ordered range from two inches in diameter to ten, for plants many seasons old. They come in clear plastic, which is good for keeping an eye on the health of the roots and for making sure the pots are well-drained but still moist. Drainage is key to the health of all orchids, and the roots perform photosynthesis as well as the leaves, so may try to grow outside of an opaque pot.

Other types of pots are the classic white plastic, and terra cotta, green, or other colors of plastic. Orchid pots have twice as many holes in the bottom, to encourage water to drain quickly. Roots sitting in water will turn brown and mushy, and eventually die. Other popular pots for the culture of these plants that love an airy environment are net pots, which keep the growing medium around the roots but allow maximum circulation of light and air, and unrestricted drainage.

An orchid has outgrown its pot when the plant spreads outside the rim. The plant should not be disturbed when it has produced a spike, or flowering stem, or is flowering. A healthy young plant may need to be shifted about every six months.

For repotting an orchid, select the next size larger pot. Have a sharp knife and soak a sufficient amount of the proper soil mix. Some orchids will grow in straight sphagnum moss, which also needs to be thoroughly wet and then drained and fluffed. Gently squeeze or tap the outgrown pot to loosen the plant's roots for easy removal, using the knife gently around the inner sides if necessary.

When the plant is free of its pot, gently remove the old soil from around the roots, getting them as clean as possible without damaging them. Some varieties have delicate roots, while others have thick ones. Trim any roots that are not firm and white or green in color; dead or dying roots will be soft, mushy, and brownish. Line the bottom of the new pot with stones or plastic peanuts (not the water soluble ones), and cover them with a layer of mix. Then, holding the plant upright, gently sift the soil mix or moss around the roots, and pack it gently as you work up. The rhizome should not be buried.

There are specialty items that can be used in settling the plant into a new pot. There are rhizome clips, which are pushed among the upper roots and secured to the rim of the pot to keep the plant securely inside. Humidity trays catch excess water in a lower tray, where it can provide humidity without touching the roots. You can use stakes made of wood, wire, or plastic to support plants, with plastic or paper ties to secure the stems to the stakes, or use plant rings, which circle the plant to keep it from leaning

