

# What kind of pots should be used?

By Linda Fortner

Clay pots are good if you grow your orchids in high humidity or if you tend to over water because the surface of the pot is porous and the moisture will pass through it. They are more expensive and heavier than plastic pots. Most commercial growers use plastic pots because they are cheaper and much lighter than clay. At the current cost of shipping, every ounce of weight is significant.

Many orchids (Dendrobiums, Cattleyas, Oncidiums just to name a few) grow better mounted on tree bark, pressed tree fern, or cork bark with a little sphagnum moss around the roots. Mounted orchids need to be watered more frequently than potted orchids.

## What kind of media should I use?

Now that is a harder question to answer than the pot question. There are many types of media available that can be used for your orchids. Cork nuggets, wine corks, bark (small, medium, and large, rock wool, New Zealand Sphagnum moss, tree fern, lava rock, and, I know you won't believe this, but I heard about a man that swears by **horse manure!**

You may purchase all of the above from various sources. Or, you can make your own mix like I do. I use equal portions of small size fir bark, small charcoal chips, and perlite. This mix is best for orchids with tiny or fine roots. I make a similar mix using medium size fir bark, medium size charcoal chips, and a larger grade of perlite for my large-root type plants like my Cattleyas. I have also had good luck with a peat-based mix for my Phalaenopsis and Miltonias. My Phaphiopedilums are potted in either the fine bark mixture or N.Z.sphagnum moss. PEANUTS! Those little peanuts you find in all your packages are just the thing for lining the bottom of your pots (they create a large air space to collect and drain any excess water). You can use broken pieces of clay pots or rocks, but these materials are heavy.

## What size pot should I use?

*Never* over pot (using a pot larger than necessary)! If the orchid has good root growth (a lot of healthy roots--white with green tips), the next size larger pot would be just right. *IF* you have lost

A lot of the roots (due to trimming brown and mushy roots -- see below) a one size smaller pot may be what you need.

## How do you re-pot?

Always trim away most of the dead roots before potting. I soak my media in a pail of water and use it wet when I pot. Another thing to remember is there is no way you are going to keep all the roots inside the pot! It is ok to let the roots grow out of the pot. I always like to tell people that orchids are in the pots for *your* benefit, *not* theirs. I am sure many of the potted orchids would be happier clinging to a large tree high above the jungle floor. If I have divided an orchid, I always dust the places I cut with sulphur. The sulphur helps avoid rot.

Don't let your newly potted orchids wiggle loosely in the pot. Stake the plant so it is seated firmly in the media. After re-potting, I place the plant in a shaded area and do not water it for about two weeks. (This is why I soak my media). When I see new root growth, I move the orchid to its new place on the greenhouse benches. I pot in the spring since most orchids begin their new growth at that time of year. If I need to re-pot any other time of year, I will do so only after the plant has completed blooming or if the new roots are less than 1/2" long. I re-pot each orchid every two years because the bark breaks down (rots) which could in turn start rotting the plant roots.

Ok, here come all the **DON'TS**. I learned not to do these the hard way... I did them all:

**DON'T** jump from potting mix to potting mix, when you find something that works, stay with it! Or, if you insist on being adventurous, try only a few plants in the new mix and not your whole collection!

**DON'T** try to re-pot everything in one day if you have a large collection. Start with a few (5-10) plants and wait a week or two to see how well they adapt to your potting methods and materials-- especially if you are new to re-potting orchids. Remember, you will need sufficient space in a shaded area to keep the re-potted orchids while they adapt to their new homes.

**DON'T OVER WATER** a newly re-potted plant.

**DON'T** divide your plants into very small divisions.

**DON'T** use dirty pots! Always use new or sterilised pots. Sterilise your cutting tools between each plant to avoid spreading viruses and diseases (I use a small propane torch for my cutting tools). Keep your work area clean between potting (use newspaper -- place a new piece down for each new plant).

**Follow these guidelines and have fun potting!**