

## How I Grow My Orchids



Spring seems to be late this year, but my house plants have been reacting to an increase in light since February. Since moving into my present house 15 years ago, I find that some of my plants have suffered. I gave away the bigger plants (close to a metre), for whom there were no big windows that provided good light. I tried to concentrate on the smaller plants, but inevitably I either am given or purchase something big again.

The big *Cattleyas* do OK, once I can put them outdoors, but I wind up bringing them in, in the fall, with unwanted travellers like slugs, etc., and that is a subject for another discussion.

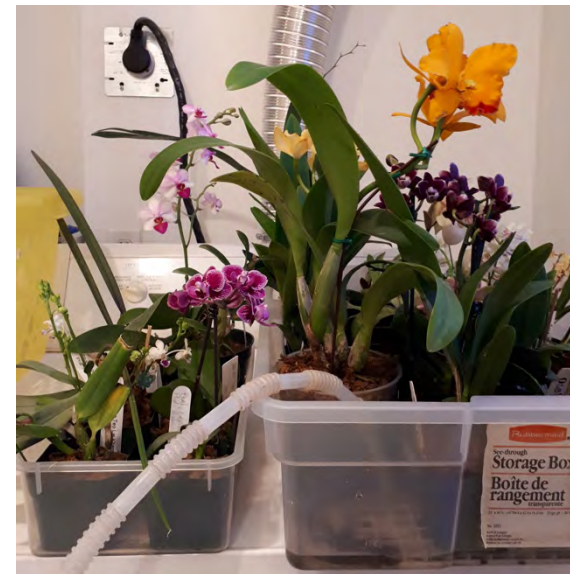
Since I had been asked to do out-of-town shows, I found myself buying a few more plants. After our own show, at which I purchased more plants, but tried to stick to miniatures, I found the need to repot my plants. For those of you who are new to orchid growing, the question always arises when to repot? I purchased enough orchids in the flimsy plastic holders that keep the orchid roots in sphagnum moss which can cause root rot if the orchids are overwatered, because sphagnum moss does hold its water well. That is not to say that all orchids potted in sphagnum moss will rot, but in my case I group my orchids in clear plastic utility boxes and water the boxes instead of each plant.

That way it takes me less time to water. I use a car siphon to drain the water into a bucket. It is not necessarily a good thing to grow the plants that way, because if you introduce a new plant to your old plants and the new plant has bugs, or viruses, then all your old plants will tend to get bugs or viruses. So, beware and keep new purchases separate from your old purchases not to introduce any problems.

Because of my plant grouping, my plants retain the water longer and the sphagnum moss does not dry out, so plants such as *Phalaenopsis* tend to get soggy roots when potted in sphagnum in my house. I tend to water once a week, but when it is cold outside and I have old fashioned radiators that give off heat, above which my plants sit, I do sometimes give them water more often; therefore, bark is a much more preferred potting medium for my plants. Bark does disintegrate with time and needs to be changed also.

In the past I had looked into different types of potting mediums. You can find many possibilities in businesses that sell hydroponic supplies. Each material has different properties. Some, like clay pellets, can get overgrown with algae. Algal growth in small amounts is not too problematic, but in large amounts, if it smells bad, can cause orchid roots to decompose. There are some algae that are beneficial, so do some research if you wish to change your potting media.

I managed to re-pot the new purchases, but still have to re-pot the overgrown orchids or ones that are in a dire need for repotting. Ideally one should re-pot a plant when it is not in flower and just starting new growth, but if it is a case of getting the plant out of rotting material, I repot when I notice the plant struggling. Now that I have purchased so many new plants, I am considering growing under lights again because my house does not have ideal lighting for my plants, but that too is a better subject for another time! Happy potting!



*Barbara Wysocka*