

Paphiopedilum (Slipper Orchid)

The Ultimate House Plant



Origins

Paphiopediliums, or slipper orchids originate from the Far east. This includes southern China, down through India, Myanmar, Malaysia, Borneo and as far South as New Guinea, covering most of the Islands of the Philippines in between. They are found in a variety of environments from full sun mountain tops to lower cliffs near the salt sprays of sea level. Aside from these extremes, many are located in dense forests. They are semi-terrestrial, and can be found growing in humus on the forest floor and also occasionally on trees. They naturally bloom from October to May.

Easy to grow in the home

It is important to know the above mentioned information because the best growth is gained if you consider the origins and natural environment of the orchid and make efforts to replicate it. Fortunately in this case, simulating a similar environment is very possible in the home! You don't have to live in the middle of a dense Jungle to grow slipper orchids well!

Best Cultural Practices

Light

The slipper orchid as mentioned above grows on the forest floor. With this in mind, providing the orchid with filtered, indirect light is best. In the home this means either an east or west facing window. It can also grow in a south facing window if it is somewhat shaded by either an awning or a sheer curtain. Florescent lights of 2 or 4 bulbs just above the leaves is also a great way to provide light.

Water

Paphiopedilums do not have pseudobulbs and for that reason, water must always be available to the roots. With that said, it is important that these plants are kept moderately moist meaning they do not like to sit in water and conversely do not like to dry out. For most people, this means watering once or twice a week

Humidity

Slipper orchids enjoy humidity levels somewhere between 50-70%. In drier home conditions however, placing the plant on a gravel or pebble tray is ideal. If your home is exceptionally dry, a gentle misting in the early morning hours will also help. It is important that misting does take place in the morning so that there is enough time for the foliage to dry. Damp and dark environments often aid in disease development. When humidity levels are higher, it is important to provide the plants with increased air circulation.

Air circulation

Good air circulation that is warm and moist is vital to good growth especially if you have a collection of slipper orchids. Furthermore, it is important to avoid hot or cold drafts directly near the plants. Do not place plants near heat registers or cold open windows.

Temperature

In terms of temperature there are two requirements for Paphiopedilums. The mottled leaved ones prefer warmer growing conditions (60-65F night, 75-80F day) whereas the green leaved varieties prefer slightly cooler growing conditions(50-60F night, 75-80F day). In the home there are sometimes dips in temperatures. Paphs are quite tolerant to these slides and generally do not react adversely to occasional dips in temperature.

Plant Nutrition

For best results, fertilize every other watering with a weak nutrient solution (100 to 250ppm). Shultz Orchid Food is ideal. We do not fertilize at every watering as it is important to alternate watering with clear water to prevent fertilizer salts build up in the pot. It is also very important to avoid fertilizers that contain Urea.

Potting

Never over pot Paphs as this can lead to them being over watered, so grow them in as small a pot as possible. Often a 11cm/4 inch pot is used. Repotting often can take place every other year or when the media decomposes.

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