

Orchid Growing Calendar

December

Temperature range:	Day/degrees	Night/degrees
Cool House	55	50
Intermediate House	58-65	58
Warm House	68-73	68

Our memories are a poor thing to rely on to keep track of when different things have been done or should be done to the orchid collection. A calendar reserved solely for such use, and conscientiously referred to, is a valuable tool. Choose a size sufficiently large to accommodate modest-sized notes on any given day.

On cooler days you can keep the temperature lower than this, for some time, without major harm to the plants, but if you go too low, you can cause damage to them. It helps to keep the greenhouse a little on the dry side. It also takes less heat for the greenhouse when humidity is lower. One way to do this is to water only a portion of the greenhouse at one time, rather than all of it. The greenhouse has a better chance to dry out by nighttime this way.

Do not allow the daytime temperatures to rise too high before ventilating the growing house after having it closed during the night or even during especially cold days. Fresh air is important for healthy plants and their owners. Just remember that if the grower can be reasonably comfortable with the temperature and humidity conditions in the growing house, the plants are likely to be satisfied too.

By the end of the month we will have the winter solstice; that is when the sun is at its furthest point south, and we have the shortest day and longest night. Plants are unable, with the short days, to repair any damage to them that may occur. Treatment with bactericide and fungicide should be taken to combat any rot spotted.

As the year draws to a close, now you will have time to reflect on the success, or failure, of your efforts in the past season, and perhaps plan to change some of your procedures.

Don't be afraid to try something new, just don't change everything in case your new ideas aren't as successful as you would like.

Cattleya Alliance: Watch you *C. skinneri* var. *alba* that should be pushing its buds up into dried sheaths for a January flowering; do not cut the sheaths off or open. *C. trianae* and its hybrids ought to be blooming for several months beginning now. And many *Sophranitis* hybrids typically flower in this season, proving a bright splash of color. *Laelia anceps*, the Christmas orchid, will have well defined buds just waiting for nature's signal to burst open. With all of the distraction, it will be easy to miss the intrusion of cockroaches and other pests, driven indoors by changes in weather and now preying on luscious root tips and flower buds at just the wrong time. Scatter roach baits under and on the benches, or, when appropriate, utilize a mechanical control system such as two bricks or a carefully directed shoe sole. Geckos, chameleons and other lizards will also keep cockroaches in check in a greenhouse where toxic chemicals are not applied.

Keep pseudobulbs and leaves as plump as possible by misting on sunny days or raising the humidity.

Oncidium: look for the mule-ear oncidium, *Oncidium splendidum* and popular thin-leafed type, *Oncidium maculatum*; both should be producing spikes now, with the largest number of plants flowering in January. *Oncidium splendidum* can be groomed attractively to carry its gorgeous display

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Calendar (*Continued*)

of swirling yellow skirts, the “dancing ladies,” on an erect inflorescence; stake the raceme as it grows upward, but do not allow the tip to droop as you would for a phalaenopsis. *Oncidium maculatum* may be in flower for Christmas providing long-lasting satisfaction and a pleasant fragrance.

Paphiopedilums: Even at this time of year, lady’s slippers should be shaded from the sun, and the atmosphere around them should be kept always moist and comfortable.

Phalaenopsis: Commonly called moth orchids, phalaenopsis are about to begin their long season of spectacular displays. Avoid excess plant movement while the buds are developing or the buds may blast (whither). Be advised that high humidity in a closed house can also lead to flower spotting caused by *Botrytis*; provide supplementary air circulation using even a small fan just to avoid still air.

Dendrobiums: The leaves should be kept free of dust. They need very little water this month, and the temperature should be lower. For deciduous types, dormancy will gradually set in, and then they will need to be kept cool and dry.

Miltonias: The new growth should now be showing good root activity. Do not let them dry out.

Odontoglossums: By now these cool-loving orchids have had a chance to regain their strength and vigor. Keep them moist and do not let them become dry.

Vandas and Relatives: *Rhynchostylis gigantea* should be pushing its flowering stems outward at an increasing rate this month. The uncommon Philippine species *Ascocentrum aurantiacum* may have some inflorescences in flower by the end of the month; its beautiful yellow blooms are distinctive, although the plants resemble *Ascocentrum curvifolium* physically. *Amesiella* (syn. *Angraecum*) *philippinensis* can flower in December, but in any case, some clones may bloom any time from now through March. Plants of *Tuberolabium kotoense* (called *Saccolabium quisumbingii* in the horticultural trade) are frequently confused with *Amesiella philippinensis*, but the flowers of the former are more numerous and are attractively speckled with rose to lavender spots. Both grow well in sphagnum moss, but *Amesiella philippinensis* prefers less light, similar to phalaenopsis-like conditions.

Miscellaneous: Your nobile-type dendrobiums already may be showing some swollen nodes on their leafless canes; by month’s end, flowers can appear because the buds develop rapidly.

Some of the mottled-leafed paphiopedilum species—*Paphiopedilum fairrieanum* and *Paphiopedilum sukhakulii*—will bloom now; keep their potting medium moist and avoid getting water in the pouch.

Ludisia discolor (syn. *Haemaria discolor*) will begin to spike soon; clean the foliage now, before the inflorescences develop, if you want to maximize the beauty of this decorative foliage orchid.

Remember to look closely for signs of developing insect populations while you are forced to have the collection inside in a relatively crowded greenhouse. As suggested previously, now is not the time to have a major problem with insects.

Information for these culture calendars are taken from *The AOS Bulletin, Orchid Digest*, a book *Orchids and How to Grow Them* by Gloria Jean Sessler and some of my own experiences.