

Orchid Growing Calendar

November

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

During this month, seedlings, as well as plants in bud, could be given some additional light to encourage them to bloom. Shading should be removed from most plants and will not be needed again until February. For the next three or four months the plants should receive all the sunlight possible. Because of dull and rainy days the humidity outside rises, so keep the humidity down inside greenhouse. Higher humidity in the greenhouse encourages Botrytis to develop on flowers. You can control it with good air movement, by keeping water off flowers, and by the use of a good fungicide. If it should be foggy outside, keep the greenhouse closed. Water plants in the greenhouse moderately, being careful to see they are dry by nightfall. Plants are using less water now because of low light, lower temperature and higher humidity. Because of higher temperatures in the warm house, or on a sunny day, you may need to mist during the day to keep humidity up.

Winter indoor water is less intuitive. You will probably need to water more often. This depends on the relative humidity in the house. Many houses have notorious low indoor winter humidity. To compensate for this, water frequently and mist plants in the morning. Plastic pots transpire water considerably more slowly than clay pots. Watch for shriveled leaves and dried root tips; these are signs of low humidity and insufficient watering. Remember, winter watering is a fine balance between dehydration and over-watering.

To save on heating cost temperatures can be turned down a little lower than those recommended, without damage to plants. It will slow down growth a little and also delay blooming somewhat. You can also save heat in the greenhouse by double-lining the inside of your greenhouse with plastic film. The dead air space in the walls acts as insulation to hold heat in. It would also help to drop the ceiling of your greenhouse, which may account for one-third the space in the greenhouse. Good air movement also helps to maintain an even temperature.

Don't forget the insects are still at work during the winter months and care should be taken to protect against them. Make sure you check for rots and treat with fungicide and bactericide whenever found.

Now that the orchids are back in the greenhouse where they can be protected from adverse winter elements, benches and racks are crowded. Plan to spend extra time organizing plants so that all are exposed to optimum light levels.

Be vigilant inside; turn leaves to look for pests and eradicate them quickly when they are found.

Aerangis: Many species of this popular genus prefer to be kept much drier during the winter months when they are not in active growth. You can determine this by watching the root tips. Generally, the following species do better if mounted, which allows them to be on the dry side: *mystacidii*, *verdickii*, *luteo-alba*, *distincta* and *punctata*.

Miltonias and Masdevallias: You can repot your Colombian *Miltonias* and *Masdevallias* this month, or next, if not in bloom. The cooler weather seems to be better for *Masdevallias*.

Catasetum: It's natural for these orchids to begin regressing. The leaves will start to degenerate, as a signal the flowering season is about to begin. Reduce watering to compensate for lack of active growth.

Cattleyas: Growth is at a standstill, making it doubly important that plants dry out before being watered again. Misting on sunny days will help keep their pseudobulbs from shriveling. Summer's growth is finished, and sheaths that will flower from winter through April and May are set. Older sheaths on spring-flowering cattleyas, which may have been present since July will begin to senesce

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and turn yellow. When this happens, gently remove the sheath to prevent condensation from forming inside that will kill any buds present. The growth should still flower in its time, but the developing spike will need additional support that would have been supplied by the sheath.

If the pseudobulbs do begin to shrivel, it is not a sign they need more water, just a moister atmosphere. The one exception is that plants that are flowering will need more water, but when they have finished flowering, watering should be reduced.

With the show season fast approaching, now is the time to begin organizing your soon to be groomed entries. Re-tie each specimen to be sure that the newly produced growths are adequately supported. Position cattleyas with the newest growth facing the direction of the light source. New growths of *Cattleya skinneri* may already have some dried sheaths; do not remove them.

Phalaenopsis: The first signs of the new flowering season are evident. Observe emerging racemes (casually referred to as spikes by most of us) between the lower leaves near the base of the plant. When the spike is about 10-12 inches tall, put a permanent stake in place. Tie the spike to it loosely for directional guidance and support. This same tie can be gradually moved up the stake (to about 12 inches) as the spike lengthens. Always keep the string's point of contact with the spike at least 4 inches below the growing tip. Additional ties will likely be necessary as the spike elongates. Recall from previous columns that you should not be moving the plant around during the period of spike development; changing the plant's orientation to its light source will cause the spike to twist. To get more spikes with more flowers switch to a fertilizer with reduced nitrogen, such as a "bloom-booster" formula.

Paphiopedilums: As their buds open, the flower stems should be held erect with stakes. While the flower buds are developing and the plants are flowering, they should never become dry. The flowers should last for several months and provide a welcome display during the holidays. Drastically reduce fertilizer as this time.

Cymbidiums: From now until the spring, cymbidiums are at their best. Some are flowering, while others are still developing their spikes to bloom during winter's dullest days. Lower light levels and temperatures will improve flower quality and longevity.

Those flowering must never dry out. Be sure to stake the spikes so they do not break from the weight of the flowers.

Dendrobiums: The nobile type should have as much air as possible. To ripen their pseudobulbs, watering should now be gradually reduced. Australian type dendrobiums will have hardened off their growths by now and soon will be showing spikes. Hybrids derived from *Den kingianum* and *Den spiciosum* grow and flower best if kept much cooler in late autumn and winter. Keep plants in bright light and switch to a fertilizer with less nitrogen.

Vanda: Few vandas flower during this month; but with all of the plants being moved around in the greenhouse, be sure to locate your vandace with careful attention to light. Generally, vandaceous orchids should be given maximum available illumination: hang them above the benches of cattleyas.

Lycaste: Pseudobulbs should be fully formed now. The leaves will begin to degenerate on the deciduous varieties, but don't be concerned; they will soon just drop off. Taper off on the water to prevent edema, a bursting of the cell walls (blistering). Keep plants in a bright but airy location as the flower spikes develop.

Zygopetalum: This will be the main season for this genus and the next couple of months will provide a show of color and fragrance. Reduce watering and keep the temperature above 50 degrees to avoid black leaf ticking.

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.