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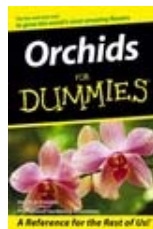
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Flocking to Moth Orchids

Adapted From: [Orchids For Dummies](#)

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Moth orchids (*phalaenopsis*) are the most popular orchids grown today. According to the American Orchid Society, moth orchids account for 75 percent of all orchids sold! They offer everything that most orchid growers admire and are the fastest and easiest to grow. They bloom for a long time — from many weeks to months. The flowers are classy and borne on elegant arched sprays. And moth orchids come in a broad range of colors. Their foliage is beautiful glossy green or marbled, they have very modest light requirements, and they grow well in temperatures commonly found in the home.

The beauty of moth orchids

The standard pink, white, and striped varieties commonly sold in stores and at flower shops are the essence of style, but in addition to these beauties, there are many new and exciting colors, color patterns, and growth habits that even increase their desirability. Although most *phalaenopsis* are not fragrant, some are not.

Leaves

All the moth orchids have handsome foliage. Many of them have dark-green, leathery, glossy leaves, while others exhibit exquisitely marbled dark-green and gray-green leaves, so even when these plants aren't in bloom, they remain quite attractive (see Figure 1).

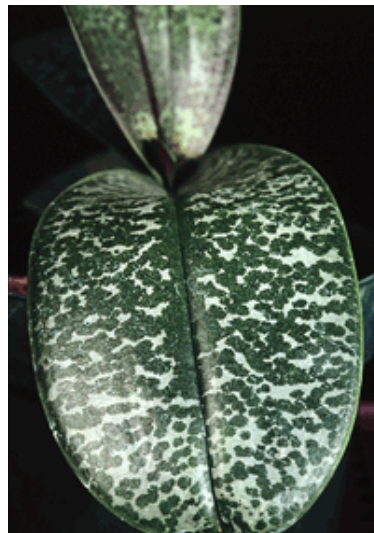


Figure 1: A close-up of the beautifully patterned leaf of *Phalaenopsis stuartiana*.

Flower shapes



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The various types of moth orchids have very similar shapes, though many of the newer varieties have a very rounded look. Figure 2 shows you the names of the parts of the moth orchid flowers. Because moth orchids epitomize style, they're frequently used in flower arrangements and in simple, yet chic, corsages.

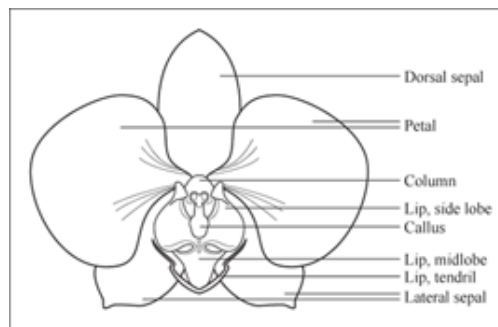


Figure 2: The parts of a moth orchid (phalaenopsis) flower.

Flower colors

White, pink, and candy-striped are the "standard" moth orchids that are most commonly found at flower shops and box stores as both potted plants and cut flowers for wedding bouquets (see Figures 10-3 and 10-4). These colors of moth orchids seem to have reached the pinnacle of perfection in flower size and shape and, because of modern reproduction and growing methods, they're highly affordable. In fact, in Europe and certain large urban centers in the United States, they're commonly purchased as an expendable blooming potted plant that is discarded after its many weeks of bloom.



Figure 3: Just about all white phalaenopsis available today display pristine, round, graceful flowers.



Figure 4: Candy-striped moth orchids present a striking picture. This one is called *Phalaenopsis Jackie Debonis*.

Due to the fine efforts of orchid hybridizers in the United States, Asia, and other parts of the world, moth orchids now come in a huge variety of flower colors — from harlequins with random spotting patterns backed with yellow or white petals (see Figure 10-5) to dark purple, and rich pink with white lips (see Figure 10-6), clear yellows, greens, and burgundy reds. About the only color that isn't yet found in phalaenopsis is blue, and breeders are working diligently to add this color to the palette.



To intensify the markings on these orchids, try growing them in a little drier, cooler, and brighter location than usual when they're starting to flower.



Figure 5: A harlequin-type of orchid, *Phalaenopsis Sue Chin*.



Figure 6: *Phalaenopsis* Hilo Lip is a dark cerise with a bright white lip.

Scents

Few beginning orchid lovers realize that some phalaenopsis are blessed with a wonderful perfume. Certain moth orchids from the wild naturally have this characteristic and, when they're used as parents, they sometimes pass this quality on to their offspring.



When you're buying other moth orchids, check to see if any of them have these plants listed as their parents; this will increase their chances of being fragrant.

Here are some of the sweet-smelling phalaenopsis hybrids noted for their fragrance:

- *Phalaenopsis* Ambo Buddha 'SW'
- *Phalaenopsis* Caribbean Sunset 'Sweet Fragrance'
- *Phalaenopsis* Dottie Woodson
- *Phalaenopsis* Ember 'Blumen Insel'
- *Phalaenopsis* Kilby Cassviola 'Sweet Fragrance'
- *Phalaenopsis* Orchid World 'Bonnie Vasquez'
- *Phalaenopsis* Perfection Is 'Chen'

Some of the phalaenopsis species (those in the form naturally found in the wild) are fragrant and are used in breeding to pass this characteristic to new varieties. These species are a little bit harder to find and grow but are worth the effort:

- *Phalaenopsis amboinensis*: Musky fragrance
- *Phalaenopsis bastianii*: Very fragrant
- *Phalaenopsis bellina*: A very fragrant scent of lily-of-the-valley and freesia
- *Phalaenopsis fasciata*: Light rosy-floral scent
- *Phalaenopsis gigantea*: Scent of orange peels
- *Phalaenopsis hieroglyphica*: Rose
- *Phalaenopsis lueddemanniana*: Light sweet fragrance
- *Phalaenopsis mannii*: Light scent of oranges
- *Phalaenopsis odesta*: Honeysuckle or lilacs
- *Phalaenopsis schilleriana*: Lightly rose-scented

- *Phalaenopsis tetraspis*: Strong sweet scent
- *Phalaenopsis violacea*: Spice and cinnamon



When it comes to moth orchid flower fragrance:

- Usually these orchids are fragrant during the day.
- On occasion, their scent will only last for a few hours each day.
- Sometimes the flowers have to be open for a few days before they emit a scent.
- Their perfume will be strongest on still, hot, sunny days.

Variety in size

Some of the glorious moth orchids you see in the stores make an impressive show with their 24- to 36-inch (60- to 90-cm) arcing flower spikes, but these plants may not fit in the more limited growing space you can provide. Luckily, there are diminutive moth orchids that thrive in smaller places. In fact, there is now an entire group referred to as *multiflorals* or *sweetheart* types that have many flowers up to 2 inches (3 cm) across on very compact growing plants.



If space is at a premium, look for these specific plants or see if these miniatures have been used as parents in the plants that you're considering:

- *Phalaenopsis equestris*
- *Phalaenopsis* Sogo Twinkle
- *Doritaenopsis* Purple Gem
- *Phalaenopsis* Carmela's Pixie
- *Phalaenopsis* Cassandra
- *Phalaenopsis* Mini Mark 'Holm'

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