

What Do I Do When My *Phalaenopsis* Orchid Looks Like It's Wilting?

Phalaenopsis orchids continue to be, and likely forever will be, the most popular houseplant orchid. Their long-lasting flowers have become an exotic, economical, and effective replacement for cut flowers. *Phalaenopsis* orchids do not require direct sun and prefer average room temperatures, making them one of the best flowering houseplants.

Despite our best efforts, we are sometimes confronted with the observation that one of our plants doesn't look quite right. For example, Sandy writes, "A couple of my *Phalaenopsis* orchids look like they are wilting. What do I do?!" First off, thanks for sending photos Sandy, that really helps.

When any plant appears to be wilting, our first instinctual response is that the plant needs water. And while that is likely true, a more appropriate question is, "Why is the plant lacking water?" Sure, most plants wilt when they are not getting enough water; they simply need more water. But with epiphytic orchids, like *Phalaenopsis*, we may have a different situation.

Just because your *Phalaenopsis* orchid is wilting, does not necessarily mean you need to water it *right now*. Yes, the plant may be lacking water, but that does not mean you need to water it *right now*. You might now say, "Wait Chuck, that sounds kinda silly. Shouldn't I always water a wilting plant right away?" Good question; let me continue.

Remember *Phalaenopsis* orchids, like many orchids, are epiphytes. That is, they live in trees. They have adaptations to survive periods where water is lacking. However, the roots of *Phalaenopsis* orchids, adapted for living in trees, quickly rot from lack of air if the roots remain constantly wet.

A wilting *Phalaenopsis* may have actually suffered from *over-watering* to the extent that *all the roots have rotted and died, leaving the plant with no means to uptake water...*until new roots have grown. If conditions do not improve (e.g. optimal humidity, water, temperature, new potting media) new roots will *not* grow and the plant will die.

**Therefore, to deal with a wilting *Phalaenopsis*,
first take the orchid out of the pot and inspect the roots!**

If the roots appear healthy and firm, the plant has likely become too dry. Give it a good watering and provide optimal conditions, including

supplemental humidity.

On the other hand, *if almost all of the roots appear rotted and dead*, the plant may need to be repotted, sometimes into a smaller container, depending on the orchid. Orchids that have been severely over-watered often need to be removed from their current pot, have all the dead roots removed, and be repotted into the same size *or smaller* pot with fresh potting media.

Some orchids get over-watered and the roots or the whole plant rots to an extent that the plant cannot recover. For more on repotting, see the Repotting section in Chapter 2 of my book *How Orchids Rebloom*. For more on diagnosing orchid problems, see Chapter 10 in *How Orchids Rebloom*.

A “wilting” *Phalaenopsis* does not necessarily mean it needs water.

***An *Phalaenopsis* may be “wilting”,
because the roots have died from too much water, (i.e. lack of air).
As a result, the plant now lacks a means to uptake water.***

***If your orchid appears to be wilting,
take the plant out of the pot and inspect the roots.***