

# **ORCHID REPOTTING BASICS**

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## **I. A STRONG HEALTHY ROOT SYSTEM IS OF PRIME IMPORTANCE TO THE SUCCESSFUL GROWING, MAINTAINING AND BLOOMING OF YOUR ORCHIDS**

## **II. WHEN TO REPOT YOUR ORCHID?**

- a.** Best time to repot nearly all orchids is DURING ACTIVE PERIODS OF ROOT GROWTH (roots with green or reddish tips), just as the roots are emerging. Usually occurs when plants are initiating new growth of pseudobulbs or after blooming, but not always. Some members of cattleya alliance produce new pseudobulbs prior to sending out new roots, so repot them only when new roots begin to appear. Paphiopedilums are an exception. They can be repotted almost anytime and benefit from fresh medium. Cymbidiums are best repotted after blooming but can be done later in the season, if necessary.

## **III. REASONS TO REPOT**

- a.** Orchid has outgrown pot
- b.** Medium has broken down
- c.** Want to change medium to suit your growing conditions. New plants, particularly from Hawaiian growers, can be a problem as well as plants grown in sphagnum moss (ex. Phals)
- d.** Plants are not growing well in existing medium
- e.** Desire to multiply (divide) plant

## **IV. REPOTTING TIPS**

- a.** Use gloves and clean tools (sterilize all tools or use sterile, disposable razor blades, potting sticks, clean surfaces, etc) to avoid transmission of disease or viruses from plant to plant.
- b.** Remove plant from pot and discard old media and dead roots. Try not to disturb viable roots with attached media, which are usually on lead pseudobulbs of plant produced during the previous growing season.
- c.** Use repotting time as an opportunity to clean up plant by removing dead leaves, old pseudobulbs, and spent sheaths or spikes. Check for disease and remove any scale (soap or alcohol and old toothbrush) from bulbs, rhizomes and leaves. Scale tends to hide under old protective sheaths of the pseudobulbs and flower sheaths, so be sure to examine plant carefully and remove any visible scale.
- d.** Add styrofoam peanuts (not biodegradable ones) or small stones or lava rock to bottom inch of pot to aid air circulation and drainage.
- e.** Do not over pot, since most orchids like to be root bound. Use smallest pot to accommodate roots and allow up to 2 years growth. Place back of plant (old growths) at

- back edge of pot to allow for growth from newer leads in the front of the rhizome. For orchids that are grow in multiple directions, position plant in center of pot.
- f. If plant is not vigorous and roots are not very healthy, place in smallest pot possible to encourage new root growth. Clear or clay pots with sphagnum moss works well for cattleyas.
  - g. If plant has over grown the pot and the medium is in good shape, you can just slip pot by placing the plant in the center of the larger new pot and fill in with fresh medium.
  - h. Avoid damaging new roots and new growths during potting process.
  - i. Type and size of media should be proportional to size of pot and root type. For smaller pots (1-3") use finer medium, for pots (3-5") use medium bark and for larger pots (5" and above) use large medium. Also, fine roots prefer fine medium, while medium to coarse roots do well in larger medium). Terrestrial and semi-terrestrials need a moisture retentive media.
  - j. Repotting media – use good quality bark (Kiwi bark) and medium to coarse perlite (a ratio of 3:1) – works well for cattleya, oncidium and dendrobium alliances. Some use charcoal or other inert material to open up mix and improve drainage. Size of bark gauged to size of pot, thickness of roots. Paphs use fine or mixed fine/medium bark and perlite with some added charcoal. Most cymbidiums do well in bark or coconut husk chips (pre-soaked three times to leach out salts) or in bark/perlite mix (3:1). Adding chopped sphagnum moss to bark medium can increase moisture retention for more water loving plants. If they are doing well in a given medium don't change it.
  - k. Keep newly potted plant in shadier spot for a week or two and on the drier side after the initial watering.

## V. RESOURCES

### *Texts for beginners and advanced hobbyists (paperbacks):*

Miracle-Gro's Complete Guide to Orchids, Ned Nash, Steve Frowine, Meredith Books, 2008.

Orchids for Dummies, Steven A. Frowine, Wiley Publishing, 2005.

*Online – Many websites have good information and/or videos on repotting and many other aspects of orchid growing. These are a few good ones:*

American Orchid Society at <http://www.aos.org>

St. Augustine Orchid Society at <https://staugorchidsociety.org>

rePot me website: <https://www.repotme.com/pages/all-orchid-care>

First Rays Website, a more scientific basis on orchid growing: <https://firstrays.com>

### *Local Supplies (the most economical sources I have found):*

Premixed orchid bark, small quantities: Home Depot (HD), Lowes or Walter Anderson Nursery (WAN) or SDCOS shows.

Kiwi orchid bark (small, medium, large), perlite (medium and coarse, No.3), bales of sphagnum moss – Fred Clarke, Sunset Valley Orchids, Vista, CA <http://www.sunsetvalleyorchids.com> Ph: 760.639.6255; Cell: 619.948.5942; email: [fred.clarke@att.net](mailto:fred.clarke@att.net)

Fine and medium, premium quality bark at Green Thumb Nursery, San Marcos, CA <https://www.greenthumb.com>

General Orchid Supplies: bark, charcoal, regular and coarse perlite, clear plastic pots and misc. orchid supplies - Calavo Gardens, La Mesa, CA, Ben Machado, Ph&Fax: 619.660.9810; Cell: 619.948.5942; email: [bnmach16814@aol.com](mailto:bnmach16814@aol.com)

Larger quantities of supplies, bark, charcoal, fertilizer (25 or 50 lb. bags) – Nutrien Ag Solutions (formerly Crop Production Services), San Marcos, CA (<http://www.cpsagu.com>)

Coconut husk chips – Karl Batchman, Casa de las Orquideas, Solana Beach, CA <http://www.orquideas.com> Ph&Fax: 858.755.7572, email: [casa@orquideas.com](mailto:casa@orquideas.com). The Batchman's website also contains excellent, detailed instructions on dividing, repotting and propagating cymbidiums.

Plastic and latex gloves – Smart & Final (SF), Harbor Freight (HF)

Single edge razor blades (100 packs, HD or HF), clay azalea pots (3 & 6 inch, slotted orchid or plain), bamboo stakes, and small amounts of orchid bark (HD or Lowes), clay azalea pots (4 inch) – WAN, Green Thumb Nursery when in stock.

Misc. pots and orchid supplies at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)