



Spring Repotting

March 2004

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

No matter what the weather is like, spring begins this month when the Equinox arrives with 12 hours of daylight. More important is the fact that the day length is increasing; a stimulus for many different kinds of orchids, which begin flowering, growing new leaves, roots, etc. It is also a very busy time for orchid hobbyists.

Hobbyists can take advantage of the growth cycle of many orchids by repotting those that need to be moved to new quarters. If you have done your winter homework and gotten all of the supplies you can begin this month.

Ideally, cattleyas should be repotted just as they begin new root growth. Most unifoliate cattleya species and hybrids can be repotted now and will begin to get new roots very soon after they are in their new surroundings even if they have not initiated new root growth yet. Avoid repotting bifoliate cattleyas unless new root tips have started, no matter what the time of year.

Most common vandaceous orchids love the heat and do not grow new roots or grow much unless the temperature is warm, 70 F or higher. Once air temperature at night stays higher than 65 F, root growth will continue and even accelerate with the heat and longer days. New baskets or pots are in order as soon as your growing space is warm enough.

Many phalaenopsis are now in bloom and should not be repotted until they finish. If plants are large, repotting can wait until the main flowering season is over without harming the plants or limiting flowering next year. If, however, the plant is showing signs of stress or is small it will need to be repotted earlier. Cut the flower spike off near the base of the plant and repot by the end of April, which will give the plant some time to recover before the heat of summer begins. Repotting small phals a little earlier will allow them to accumulate more new leaves and roots so they can flower as mature plants next year.

Put cut flower spikes in water and enjoy the flowers a little longer. If you cut the bottom of the spike off a quarter inch every couple of days, the flowers will last a little longer. An 81 mg aspirin in the water will also help flowers last longer.

As noted in recent "Tips Columns", paphs love to be repotted. Summer is a time when they too will grow quickly, but summer's heat also accelerates decomposition of the media. If it looks like the media is starting to break down already repot now before it gets too hot. Paphs, in general, do better when nights are cool and days are warm, not hot.

The sun's angle is also changing rapidly meaning that greenhouses without shading may need some protection. Windowsill growers need to be aware that the excellent light they were getting through a favorite window may disappear as the season progresses. If orchids are in bud, a small light placed above the plant during the day can provide a focal point that will keep buds properly oriented. This also works during gloomy days in winter.

It may be a little early to move most orchids outdoors as there are always a few cold nights that surprise us in the South during March and April. Pay attention to the local weather forecast if you do put your orchids outside. In general, cattleyas will do fine even if there are nighttime lows in the 50's. Some species and their hybrids enjoy these cooler nights,



Spring Repotting

March 2004

by Dr. Courtney Hackney, hackneau@comcast.net

[Orchid Growing Tips](#)

especially *Laelia purpurata*. The best flowering I have ever had with this species occurred when I put them outside in late March. *Cymbidiums* will also appreciate cool nights with no ill effects. Even bulldog type *Paphs* will fare well outside if you keep them out of the cold rain.

As you begin the repotting process note the condition of each plant and keep records of the types of media, pots, etc. that have provided the best growth and flowering the past year. You will also likely find some plants that have not fared well because of some problem. Keep a list of these problems in a notebook so you can watch these plants for continued problems. Special colored labels can be put in the pot to note insect infestations or any other problem you want to track. Rapidly growing orchids require nutrients so this is the time to fertilize. This is the topic of most email questions I receive and will be covered in next month's column.