



Mary Karner of Longmont gets some helpful advice from Mikhail Kujawa while shopping at Fantasy Orchids in Louisville. Right: Wils. Tiger Brew Pacific Holiday orchid.



# Delicate Beauty

Orchids are today's most popular houseplant, but need proper care

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PHOTOS BY PAUL LITMAN  
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With their delicate petals and tropical appearance, orchids have a reputation as a beautiful but difficult plant to care for. Stan Gordon of Fantasy Orchids in Louisville says they're just the opposite. If you know how to care for a regular houseplant, he says, then you already have the ability to care for an orchid.

Orchids have taken over poinsettias as the No. 1 houseplant, Gordon says, and "they aren't hard at all." They thrive on what Gordon refers to as "benign neglect," and the biggest killer of these plants is over-watering.

He says orchids grow everywhere except Antarctica and they're the largest group of plants on the planet. In the wild, they grow attached to trees where their roots are exposed. Because they grow alongside other plants, their care is just like your other houseplants.

Here are some expert tips to ensure beautiful, lasting orchids.

- While potting orchids is fine, they must have proper drainage. Water them thoroughly every four to seven days, depending on the plant's dryness, Gordon advises, but be sure they don't sit in water.

- Adequate light is the most important factor for growing beautiful orchids, Gordon says. More light means more flowering, and orchids can tolerate direct sunlight, contrary to popular belief. If the green leaves of the plant start to bleach, then the light might be too high for your plant, but this is hard to do, Gordon says.

- "People obsess over humidity," Gordon says, "But orchids acclimate and do just fine." If you'd prefer to increase the humidity for your topical plants, though, grouping them together is an easy way to accomplish this. Fresh air is important for

orchids as well.

- The older orchids get, the better they are at flowering, and orchids have no life span, Gordon says. If you're worried you may have killed your plant, bring it in to an expert like Gordon, as it might still be alive. Some orchids lie dormant, and although the blooms may fall off, this is just part of the life cycle.

If you'd still like to know more about orchids, Fantasy Orchids offers a free hour-long class that covers basic care. Gordon says people often make orchid care too complicated when it's really simple. If you've been too afraid to take on an orchid, be brave and head to your local greenhouse. The blooms on orchids often last for months, so they will be a beautiful and rewarding addition to your houseplant collection.



Phal. Yu Pin Pearl orchid.



Phal. Chain Xen Queen orchid.



Blc. Emily Simons Mendenhall orchid.