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Ask Cynthia Brian-Cymbidiums Reader's Request

Hi Cynthia:

I noticed that you include orchids as one of your favorite plants in your articles. They are beautiful but I know they are hard to grow. Any suggestions? Thanks for the great advice always.

Maggie in Moraga

Hi Maggie:

You are absolutely right that I LOVE any type of orchid. Contrary to popular belief, they are incredibly easy to grow and fairly maintenance free. Yes, I do remember the days when the media touted orchids as rare and risky, but the reality couldn't be further from the truth. Orchids are actually one of the largest flowering plants on the planets with an estimated 26,000 species!

Although native to the subtropical highlands of Southeast Asia, for Lamorinda gardeners, the Cymbidium is an easy and excellent choice for both indoors and outdoors. Cymbidiums need bright light and like to be dry before re-watering. I usually water my indoor specimens once every two to three weeks throughout the year and my outdoor ones are watered when the soil is dry. They blossom January through late spring preferring temperatures in the 50-70 degree range when blooming, making them the perfect indoor plant for late winter. When all stems have completed their blooming cycle, cut the spent flower at the base. Because I like the look of the spiky leaves, I use my plants in design details throughout the year.

If you want Cymbidiums to re-bloom (and who doesn't), it's best to put them outside in the fall in bright sunlight in a north facing space as they need cool night temperatures to set new flowers. By the way, I always keep mine in a pot and never plant them directly in the ground. As they outgrow a container, I repot. My Mom, who taught me almost everything I know about being a gardener, has over 50 potted Cymbidiums outside in her patio that re-bloom every season with four to twelve spikes. She moves them from place to place to add color and texture to her garden rooms. A girlfriend of mine keeps six to eight pots of orchids behind a retaining wall on the north side of her house. She doesn't like the look of the plant, but she adores the blooms. She cuts the long flower stems to make gorgeous arrangements and her plants give her an abundance of orchids annually without any fuss or muss. Although care instructions will tell you to fertilize orchids every other week with a half dose of 20-20-20, I have not found this to be necessary.

Throughout February, you can find displays of beautiful Cymbidiums in full glory at your local nursery, home center, and even the grocery store for under \$20. What do you have to lose? So what if it only lasts a season in your home? You'll still have two to four months of beautiful flowers gracing your décor- a much less expensive choice than buying weekly cut bouquets! Now this is a gift that keeps on giving.

Cynthia

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I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.

Cynthia will answer one or more questions every other issue as space allows. Email your comments or questions to Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com

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