

Lady's Slipper Orchid

General Information:

Paphiopedilums are the Old World relatives of North American temperate-zone lady's slipper orchids, the cypripediums. Perhaps no other orchid excites the same dedication as do these semi-terrestrials. And, happily, "paths" are one of the best orchids for home growing, requiring only fairly bright light and normal home temperatures to provide some of the orchid kingdom's longest lasting and most exotic blooms. There are classically several general types of paphiopedilums requiring slightly different cultural regimes, though all should do well with the general care instructions given here. Slipper orchids can last 8 to 10 weeks or more in bloom.

Light:

Sufficient light is important for healthy growth and flower production. Provide bright light, small amounts of direct sun. In the home, a north, east, west or shaded south window is best. Foliage should be naturally semi-erect, and firm, not drooping. Dark green, limp foliage indicates too little light.

Temperature:

Mature plants need a 15° to 20°F difference between night and day. Provide nights of 55 to 60°F; days of 70 to 85°F. This will start the bloom cycle.

Water:

Mature plants should never dry out between waterings. Allow plants to dry just slightly between waterings to avoid crown rot.

Humidity:

Paphiopedilums need 60 to 70 percent humidity. In the home, place pot on trays of moistened pebbles.

Fertilizer:

Fertilizer must be provided on a regular basis because most potting media have little, although, paphiopedilums will grow and flower with less fertilizer than most orchids. A good general rule is to use a balance (15-30-15 or similar ratio). Fertilize every week at one quarter of the recommended dilution. That is, fertilize "weakly, weekly".

Potting:

Potting should be done every one to two years before mix breaks down too far and can be done almost any time of year, using a well-drained but water-retentive mix. The best time is to do this is after blooming is finished.