

Most of the Phalaenopsis (aka 'Moth Orchids') sold commercially, are grown in a small rubber pot with tightly packed sphagnum moss (see photo below).

While you can stay with that combination, it can be difficult to control the level of moisture in the pot. If the moss is always soaking wet, it kills the roots, which is not a good development.



A soft 'See through' rubber pot is the sign of a recently imported plant.

Option #1

Soak the plant, and gently pull it out of the pot. Remove all the sphagnum, and then repack the roots with about half of the sphagnum, and put it back in the pot. This will allow more air movement through the pot; it will also dry out a bit faster.

However, the small rubber pots are not stable, and the plants tend to fall over. If you use a planter, make sure that it has a drain hole, so that the plant does not sit in water permanently.

Option #2

When the sphagnum breaks down, or sooner if you prefer a different medium in the pot, it is time to repot. Most growers use either hard plastic or clay pots, with:

- A 'fibrous' sphagnum & bark mix (holds water longer than 'B').
- A 'granular' bark/charcoal/perlite mix for better air circulation around the roots, though you will have to water a little more frequently.
- Those who have mastered the semi-hydroponic growing method use clay nuggets, usually in a plastic pot.

When to Repot

Phalaenopsis have no rest period, though the growth rate is a bit slower during the low light winter months. They can be repotted at any time (watch out that you do not break any emerging flower spikes), but early spring is the preferred time.

Pot Size

Phalaenopsis do not do well if 'overpotted' into a too large pot. Smaller plants should normally be grown in 3" or 4" pots, and larger plants in 6" or 8" pots.

Plastic vs Clay

There is no right or wrong in terms of pot selection. Clay pots 'breathe', so they dry out a bit faster. This also helps keep the roots cool during the summer. On the other hand, they are heavier, and thus more stable with tall plants than plastic pots.

Repotting Tips

- ◆ Clean off all the old potting material. Rinse the roots by 'swishing' the plant in a bucket with water.
- ◆ Do not 'bunch' the roots tightly together.
 - If you are using a **fibrous mix**, pack some material firmly in between the roots, so that the roots do not get pressed together when you pack the pot.

Place plant with packed roots in the pot, and pack the outside of the root ball. Pack firmly with fingertips, making sure that the plant is firmly anchored in the new mix.

- If you are using a **granular mix**, place the plant in the empty pot, and:
 - Fill 1/3 with mix. Shake the pot and tap it against the table, so the mix settles between the roots.
 - Fill 2/3 with mix, and repeat shaking/tapping.
 - Fill 3/3 with mix, and repeat shaking/tapping.

- ◆ Correct potting depth is important:

- Ideally the lower leaf should be just above the fresh mix in the pot.
- Ideally all roots should be in the pot and below the surface of the mix.

The plants do not always cooperate. Some plants turn 'leggy' by dropping leaves, while they still have live roots far down on the stalk. In this case, place them as deep in the pot as possible.

Others start aerial roots higher up, between the live leaves. For those plants, try to guide the aerial roots into the pot. If you can't, just let them go where they wish. This can be seen on several of the plants in the last photo.

