

How to Get Your Phalaenopsis to Bloom

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Courtney Hackney Tips, excerpted from November 2006 and January 2001 Tips Columns

Standard Phalaenopsis, those with large flowers and no fragrance, require a cool down period of 7-10 days to initiate flowering. How cold should they get? Most experienced hobbyists let temperatures get into the low 60s or even upper 50s, which generally works well. This process is even more effective if day length is getting shorter and plants are allowed to get a little drier than usual. It is also a good idea to only let phals get cooler when there is some assurance that day temperatures will warm up at least 10-15 deg F. Many commercial growers accomplish spike initiation simply by providing this day to night temperature differential and do not worry about how cool the night temperature gets. Many indoor growers of phals find that their plants do not initiate spikes until much later in the year because they do not let their home get as cool or experience this temperature range. Putting phals in an unheated porch can get them to spike.

Once the first spikes appear, it is important to maintain a night temperature of at least 65 deg F to limit disease. This becomes more critical when those gloomy days appear in winter. It is also important to increase fertilizer, especially nitrogen to growing spikes and buds. Conventional wisdom used to dictate a fertilizer low in nitrogen and high in phosphorus until buds began to form and then switch to high nitrogen fertilizer to get the most and largest blooms. Recent studies point to just using nitrogen-rich fertilizers throughout the process. While commercial or exhibition growers practice this, the hobbyist is better advised to use their normal fertilizer regimen if their phals are growing well.

Stakes should be tied just below the first bud if you want the spike to arch gracefully. To accomplish this place the uppermost tie about halfway between the last two nodes on the spike before the first bud. Be careful to avoid blocking the little sheath on these nodes as branches can emerge from the small soft tissue hidden there. Do not tie the spike tightly near the top until the first flower is open. Typically, the spike will elongate until buds have fully formed. As flowers appear it may be necessary to add weight to the rear of the pot, especially if the plant is in a plastic pot. Many growers put plastic pots inside clay pots to avoid having the whole plant crash off the windowsill or bench as flowers open.

What do you do if your Phals have not begun to spike yet. This is not an unusual problem for indoor growers. First be sure these Phals are not summer bloomers. Other Phals with a strong dose of Doritis, correctly called Doritaenopsis, may also begin flowering later in the spring or early summer. Otherwise healthy Phals should be in spike now. If they are not they may not have gotten enough light during the growing season. Or they may not have gotten the environmental notice that it is time to flower. Nature sends that message with decreasing day lengths and cool nights. Plants inside or under lights may not get the message. Try shortening the day length and cooling them at night by shutting off vents slightly to keep them cooler at night.

Additional Links:

Growing the Best Phalaenopsis - Part 1: Introduction -

<https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/GrowingtheBestPhalaenopsisPart1.pdf>

Part 2: Media, Transplanting, Water & Nutrition –

<https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/GrowingtheBestPhalaenopsisPart2.pdf>

Part 3: Temperature, Light, Insects & Diseases –

<https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/GrowingtheBestPhalaenopsisPart3.pdf>

Part 4: Production - <https://staugorchidsociety.org/PDF/GrowingtheBestPhalaenopsisPart4.pdf>

Videos from Advanced Phalaenopsis Care: Summer vs Winter Blooming Phals from <http://herebutnot.com/>

Video 1: Summer vs. Winter Bloomers - <https://youtu.be/INvklkh-rW0>

Video 2: Follow-Up Video Showing Spike Progress - <https://youtu.be/9C8Cga8yQ7M>

Video 3: 7 Months Later: Effects of Temp Cycling on Select “cool spiking phals” - <https://youtu.be/9vHmlEwYU4>