

Orchid Troubleshooting Chart

Problem	Cause	Remedy
LEAVES		
Leaves split down the middle	Dehydration	Water and mist regularly to prevent
Yellow leaves; leaves rapidly yellowing	Too much light and heat, especially from direct sun	Move immediately to a less strongly lit area. Protect from direct sun.
Leaves are turning reddish or purplish	Stress due to lack of phosphorus, too much light, poor watering, too cold.	Determine which cause is likely and correct. Repot if in old compacted bark.
Leathery, wrinkled, shriveling leaves	Not enough water. Paradoxically, often caused by too much water, causing root rot.	Trim off any dead roots and repot; water carefully. Stick to a regular schedule and monitor. Don't cut off wrinkled leaves unless they are totally dead.
Lush dark green leaves; no flowers	Not enough light	Provide brighter indirect light
Thick light green leaves but no flowers in winter months	Daily temperature range is too consistent – needs more variability	Provide cooler night / warmer day temperatures, especially from Oct - May
Bumpy, scaly whitish patches	Sunburn and scorching	Move out of direct sun
Brown, dying leaf margins	Too much sun/ light; dehydration	Move out of direct sun; mist regularly
Small whitish stains or deposits on leaves	Lime deposits from tap water; or possibly fertilizer residues	Use filtered or distilled water, not tap water, to mist. Avoid getting fertilizer on leaves or flowers
The bottom-most leaf is slowly turning brown or yellow	Die-off of one to two leaves per year is normal. Affects only bottom leaves.	Simply trim off once it is mostly dead.
ROOTS		
Air roots are discolored or stained dark brown near the crown, but thick and green otherwise.	Fertilizer burn. (Healthy air roots should be a pale silvery green).	Use urea-free fertilizer; avoid the air roots when fertilizing. Do not cut off, these roots are still perfectly viable. Hide with a bit of sphagnum moss if desired.
Air roots are shriveled, broken, have dead or dehydrated tips	Not enough humidity	Cut off badly damaged sections if desired but leave on if still greenish; mist daily or move to a more humid spot
Anchor roots (those in bark or moss) are turning dark inside the pot	Overwatering and/ or fertilizing	Reduce water; fertilize at half strength no more than once a month. Repot.
Anchor roots are mushy, smelly, dried up or sloughing off a center thread (the true root inside).	Overwatering and/ or fertilizing has caused rot. Medium may also have broken down and is rotted.	Trim off all dead roots, rinse and repot in fresh medium. Water and fertilize carefully on a schedule.

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Orchid topples out of its pot, seems unstable or wobbles when you carry it	Anchor roots have rotted away; medium is no longer able to support the weight of the top growth.	Orchids can survive with very few roots if need be. Trim and clean remaining roots and repot, temporarily supporting it with a stake. Water carefully. Fertilize at half strength or not at all until stable again.
Excessive production of air roots; orchid is “climbing” out of its pot with many air roots shooting out in all directions	Orchid is pot-bound or has grown too large for its present pot. Lots of air roots is not a problem, just a symptom of its condition. Usually seen with older orchids.	Repot in fresh medium, preferably every two years. There should be a balance of air roots and anchor roots at all times. Do not bury the air roots; it’s fine to leave them out.
FLOWERS		
Flower stalks form but bud production is suspended; they don’t progress to developed flowers	A shock or change in environment has halted bloom development.	Ensure proper light, ventilation, and temperature range. Try moving to a spot with cooler night temps/warm days for a few weeks, then return to original spot. Protect from drafts. Switch to bloom-boosting fertilizer for orchids.
Buds form but shrivel and fall off before opening	Bud blast due to shock	Cut off flower stalk, it will not rebloom. Prevent in future by protecting orchid from drafts and temperature extremes such as radiators, exterior doors etc.
Flower stalk is growing downward or is too low to properly enjoy it.	Orchids want to grow downward – it’s their natural habit in the wild. Once the stalk gets long enough it can be trained upward or into a curve for display.	Gently tie or clip the developing stem to a stake or wire support while it’s still flexible. Be careful not to break it. In about a week remove the clips, and the stem should retain the new shape.
Petals have black pinprick spots on them	Bacterial growth as a result of too much misting	Avoid deliberately wetting the flower blooms at any time. Always use distilled or filtered water when misting.
Flowers dry up prematurely, shortly after opening	Not enough water	Water weekly in bark medium and sparingly every few days in sphagnum moss. Aim for damp to semi-dry. Totally dry is fine for short periods only.
Shriveled or dead flower stalk	Flowers are over, or the stalk has been damaged or shocked	Cut off the dying stem at the crown of the plant. Be careful not to nick the leaves or emerging shoots.
Flowers are small or sparse compared to previous blooming period	Not enough growth before bloom period; not enough fertilizer	Switch to a bloom-building fertilizer especially formulated for orchids.