

phalaenopsis

PHALAENOPSIS fal-en-OP-sis

Graceful arching flowers characterize the popular *Phalaenopsis*. Forty-six species occur in tropical Asia, from India to the Philippines, New Guinea and Australia. All are epiphytes. Most inhabit lowland evergreen forests that are evenly warm and moist throughout the year. *Phalaenopsis* is derived from the Greek (moth, *phalaina*).

Phalaenopsis have short stems, usually less than eight inches, nearly hidden by strap-like leaves. They have no pseudobulbs. The flower spike arises between the leaves. All Phalaenopsis flowers have a lowermost petal, or lip, that is three-lobed. The flowers may be solid or multi-colored pink, white or yellow, often with contrasting bars or splashes on the petals and sepals.

Natural populations are at risk. Phalaenopsis habitats are being degraded by forest cutting and agricultural practices. Very little recorded data exists regarding the ecology of many species or their numbers, information that is crucial for their protection in nature. Collection of plants for sale may also threaten some species. Since nursery-propagated plants are widely available, buyers should not support companies that collect or sell wild-collected plants.

Temperature | Optimum temperatures range from a daytime maximum of 85° to a nighttime minimum of 62°. Hybrids need a week of nighttime temperatures in the 50's in late September in order to initiate buds.

Light | Phalaenopsis prefer bright light but no strong sun. Indoors an eastern exposure with morning sun is suitable.

Potting | Use a mix of fir bark, charcoal and perlite. Repot every 1-2 years, before the bark becomes waterlogged. The new pot should be no more than one inch wider than the roots on all sides. Remove the old flower spike after flowering; repotting is best done within a few months after flowering.

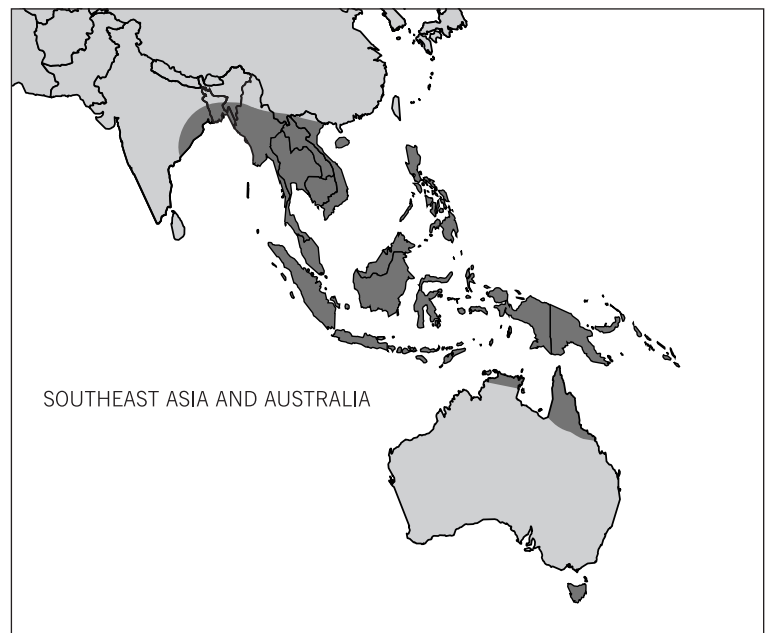
Water | when the mix dries slightly. The bark will lighten in color as it dries.

Fertilizer | Apply a half-strength water-soluble fertilizer every two weeks year-round. Use a balanced fertilizer with nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus; a high-phosphorus fertilizer may be given at the time of bud initiation (autumn) to enhance flowering.



Phalaenopsis amabilis

Courtney Garvin



ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN