



ORCHID HEALTH

What Your Leaves Are Telling You




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ORCHIDS



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While pleasing in their own right, orchid leaves often take a backseat to the exotic beauty of orchid blooms. But leaves can do something blooms can't:

Orchid leaves can help predict your plant's future.

The color and texture of an orchid's leaves are two of the best indicators of orchid health. When a healthy Phalaenopsis orchid is in bloom or is preparing to bloom, its leaves will be a bright medium green with yellow undertones (the color of healthy grass). Leaves will feel firm to the touch and have a slight waxy sheen.

Learning to recognize signs of distress in your orchid's leaves can give you a certain clairvoyance about your plant. The information in this guide will help you better understand what your orchid's leaves are telling you, preparing you to catch and address health problems before any real damage is done.



ORCHID WITH HEALTHY LEAVES





Colors Belong on the Blooms, Not the Leaves



Orchid leaves can become discolored for a number of reasons, but not all leaf coloration is harmful or even bad. For example, the bottom leaf turning yellow is a natural process of the plant discarding a mature leaf to make room for a new leaf. Generally, however, colors belong on orchid blooms, not the leaves.

Notice a foreign shade on your orchid's leaves?
Here's what it means:



YELLOW

Yellowing leaves are the trickiest to diagnose, as they can indicate a number of problems with your orchid. If you're seeing yellow, your orchid may be:

- Receiving too much light
- Exposed to overly low temperatures
- Experiencing root rot
- Suffering from spider mites



SEVERELY BURNED LEAVES





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WHITE

After turning yellow, orchid leaves that are receiving too much light will eventually turn white.



BLACK

Black leaves can indicate a bacterial or fungal growth or too much fertilizing or mineral deposits from hard water. Leaves may also turn black before falling off if an orchid has received too much light.



BROWN

Pale, brownish streaks on leaves may mean your orchid has come down with a bacterial or fungal disease.



PURPLE

Leaves that are purple or reddish in color, especially around the edges, can indicate overexposure to sunlight and dehydration.



DARK OR FADED GREEN:

Green leaves don't necessarily mean your orchid is in the clear. Dark green leaves indicate your orchid is not getting enough light. Leaves that dull or that have waned in color may mean your orchid is too dry.



Leaf Discoloration: What You Can Do

You know what the colors on your leaves mean—now what do you do? In many cases, a little intervention can return your orchid to a healthy state.



The Diagnosis: Excessive Light

Little can be done to save an orchid after it suffers from severe sun and heat damage. As soon as you notice a yellow spot, move the orchid to an area that receives less direct sunlight and more indirect sunlight.

Next, remove the plant from its decorative vase, inspecting the orchid's roots to determine if your orchid is dehydrated. Well-watered roots should be a healthy green color; grayish-white roots indicate more water is needed.

The Diagnosis: Dehydration

Rehydrate your orchid and give it a decorative look by making a humidity tray. To do this, take a shallow tray, put a layer of decorative rocks or beads in it and add a small amount of water to the tray. Set your orchid on top of the rocks.

Alternatively, you can remove the orchid from its decorative pot and run water through the grower pot for a few minutes. When the media is soaked, let the water leach out the bottom of the grower pot and return the orchid back to its decorative pot. If you notice your plant becomes dehydrated again, consider moving it to a new location that does not get as dry and hot.



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The Diagnosis: Insufficient Light

Orchids flourish when they're given generous doses of bright, indirect light, either from the sun or artificial sources, so move your orchid to a brighter room. Alternatively, you can move your orchid to a south or west-facing window, shielding it from direct sunlight with a sheer curtain.

The Diagnosis: Over Exposure to Low Temperatures

Orchids are tropical plants that prefer warmer climates. If your orchid is suffering from prolonged exposure to cold temperatures, simply relocate the plant to a warmer part of your home. Orchids should be kept in a room with temperatures that range from 65 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and 60 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit at night. Avoid placing your orchids near heating or cooling vents or fans, as drafts also prove threatening to the health of your orchid.

The Diagnosis: Root Rot

The most common orchid condition, root rot, often occurs when roots are overwatered or sit in water for an extended period. If you see brown or black mushy-looking roots, immediately stop watering your orchid and wait for the roots to dry. This may take up to 10 days.

If the plant does not recover, wait until all blooms fall to treat. With a sterile cutting tool, remove all rotted roots. Repot your orchid in fresh potting media. For the first week, mist the leaves in the morning to encourage new root growth. Be sure to follow the Just Add Ice(r) ice cube watering method after the first week.

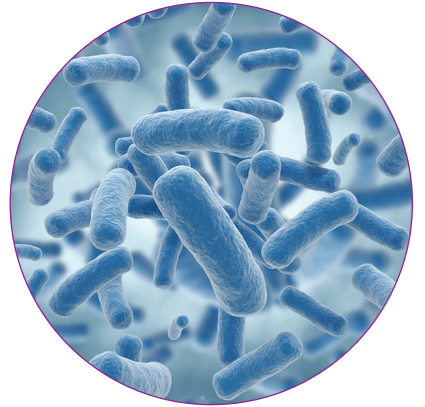




The Diagnosis: Bacterial or Fungal Disease

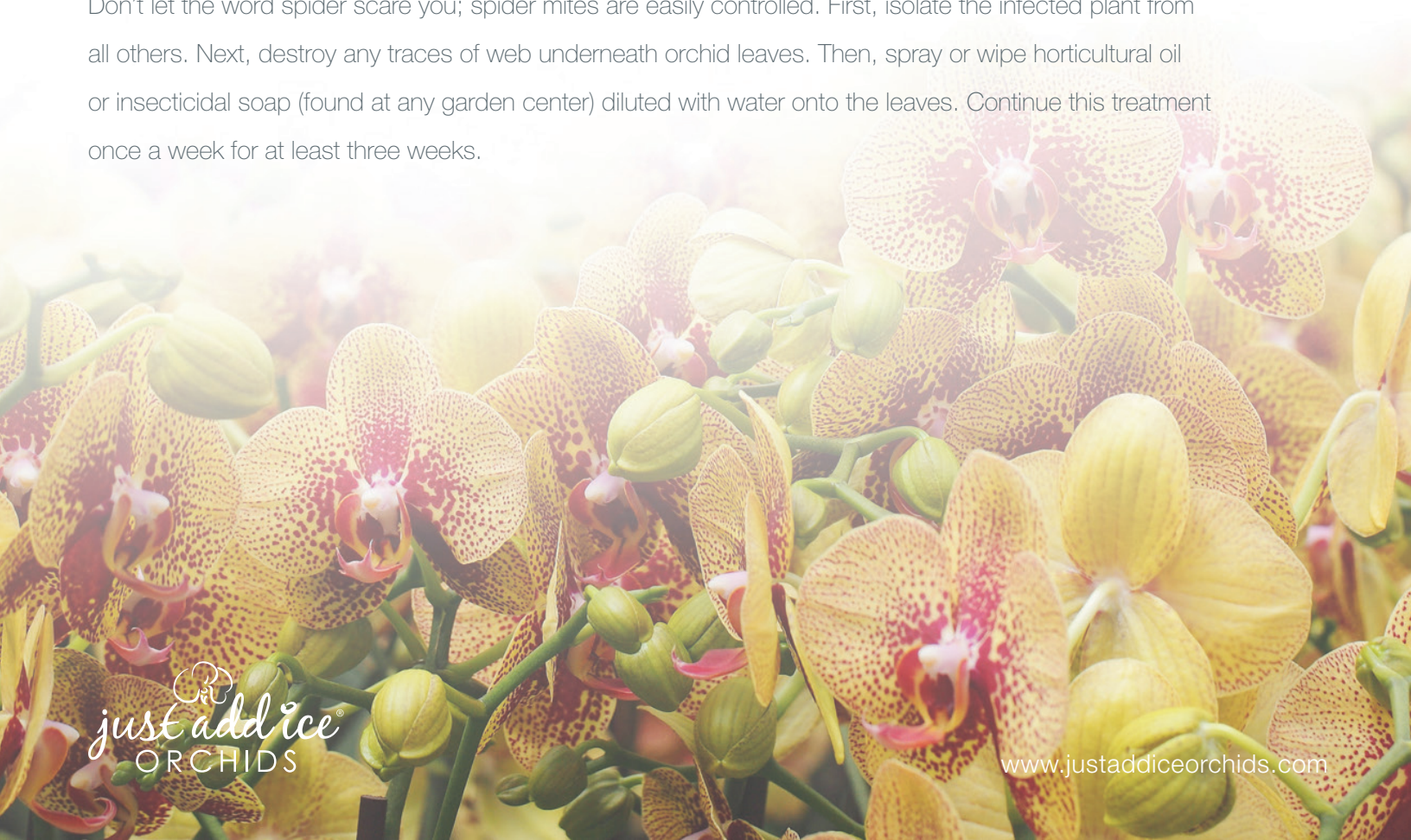
Orchid bacterial and fungal diseases can develop quickly and spread rapidly if not promptly detected and treated. If all of your orchid's leaves have fallen off, your plant will not recover. If the leaves are still in tact, begin treating by isolating the orchid from other plants and removing infected foliage using a sterilized cutting tool.

Next, spray your orchid with a broad-spectrum, high quality fungicide, following package instructions. Do this even if you suspect a bacterial infection because your plant has a greater risk of developing a secondary infection. Move your orchid to a room with improved air circulation, lower humidity and daily temperatures between 65 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit.



The Diagnosis: Spider Mites

Don't let the word spider scare you; spider mites are easily controlled. First, isolate the infected plant from all others. Next, destroy any traces of web underneath orchid leaves. Then, spray or wipe horticultural oil or insecticidal soap (found at any garden center) diluted with water onto the leaves. Continue this treatment once a week for at least three weeks.





Examining Your Other Leaf Concerns

A change in leaf color isn't the only thing that concerns orchid enthusiasts. Other changes to leaf appearance raise additional questions about the health of the plant. *These changes include:*



Wrinkled or Limp Leaves

Leaves look a little droopy? The easiest way to know what's happening with your orchid is to check the roots. Shriveled, small roots mean your plant is not getting enough water or humidity. Rehydrate your orchid by making a humidity tray or by removing the plant from its decorative pot and running water through the grower pot for a few minutes.

Sticky Leaves

A sticky substance can sometimes form on the leaves in the fall when temperatures are cooler. The substance is not harmful to your orchid and can be removed by gently wiping the leaves with a warm, wet towel. Scale pests, which appear as white bumps along the leaves and flower spike, can also secrete a sticky substance. Scale pests can be controlled with a light spray of horticultural oil or insecticidal soap.



Split Leaves

Split or cut leaves do not cause any harm to your orchid.



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Small Leaves

Orchid leaves come in all sizes; however, if you notice new leaves are much smaller than the leaves that came before, this may indicate your orchid isn't able to devote adequate energy to leaf development. De-stress your orchid by adjusting temperature levels and light exposure. Also examine the orchid's media to determine if it needs repotting.

No Leaves!

If your orchid can't seem to grow new leaves at all, it may be suffering from a phosphorus or nitrogen deficiency. Give your orchid a boost by increasing fertilizer applications to every other week. If your leaves have fallen off due to disease or extreme sunburn, nothing more can be done to save your orchid.



Observing your orchid's leaves gives you a powerful foresight into your orchid's future. To keep your orchid at peak health, keep a sharp eye for changes in color and texture, and reference this guide to render the proper treatment.


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