**December Flower of the Month: Narcissus and Orchid**

December’s blustery weather is no match for the warm, sunny disposition of the two blossoms we’re recognizing for December’s Flower of the Month: narcissus and orchid. While both are available in cut versions for vase arrangements, these two are especially popular as potted flowers in winter months. Their long-lasting blossoms provide weeks of color for holiday decorating and beyond.

**Narcissus**

The most common—and popular—species of potted narcissus during winter months is the paper white. These plants feature clusters of small, white, multiflowered blossoms on long, slender, hollow stems. You’ll usually find our shop selling them from about November through April. (Peak supplies are typically available in January, February and March—helping give all of us hope during those dreary months that spring will soon arrive!)

**Potted Narcissus Care**

* **Watering.** In your home, frequently check the pot or container in which your narcissus is growing to ensure the soil of your Flower of the Month is moist at all times. Winter air is particularly dry, so pay attention that your flowers don’t lose too much water or they will wither and die.
* **Light.** Place your plants near sunny windows—but not directly in the sunlight or they can get burned. (Similarly, keep the flowers away from heat sources, such as in the draft from heating vents.) Bright, indirect light is best. If they fail to receive enough light, their stems will weaken, becoming yellowed, elongated and droopy.
* **Fertilizer.** Don’t use fertilizer on narcissus. All of the food the flowers need is stored in their bulbs.
* **Disease.** While the soil or roots of narcissus must be kept damp, do not let them sit in water or they can develop Botrytis, which will kill them.
* **Plant stakes.** While the blossoms on narcissus are lovely, they can also become heavy for the slender stems on which they grow. That can lead to the stems leaning or flopping over. Add plant stakes and string or ribbon to help them remain upright if this begins to happen.

**Orchid**

Unlike narcissus, the other December Flower of the Month, the potted orchid, is available in a wide variety in December and year-round. Not only that, but the individual blooms can last for weeks, and the plants can last for years, even reblooming if the conditions are right.

The lovely blossoms—known by many as the *diamond* of the flower world—have what appear to be six petals. They are actually three *sepals*, two *petals* and a modified petal that creates a “lip.”

A rainbow of colors are available, from cream, white, green, pink and lavender to red, peach, orange, yellow, green and bicolors—a combination of colors. The only color you won’t find in an orchid is blue.

**Potted Orchid Care**

* **Watering.** It’s tempting to overwater orchids due to the fact that this Flower of the Month requires an evenly moist soil (actually not soil but a growing medium made of a combination of fir, pine, redwook bark, coconut husks or coir fiber, sphagnum moss or peat moss, perlite, vermiculate, gravel, sand and charcoal). So keep a close eye on your plant and water regularly (but not too regularly). The best method: Soak the potting medium and allow the water to drain completely (which should happen naturally due to the materials from which the medium is comprised). Most experts recommend watering in the morning.
* **Light.** Keep your orchid out of direct sunlight. Bright indirect light is best. Direct sunlight can burn your plant’s leaves.
* **Fertilizer.** In the winter, about every two or three times that you water your plant, follow the drenching with a dose of fertilizer. During the rest of the year, fertilize after each watering. To ensure fertilizer salts don’t build up on the roots of your Flower of the Month, flush the potting medium with water at least monthly. Discontinue fertilization once flowers have dropped off.
* **Humidity.** Orchids are a tropical plant and require humidity similar to being in their native rain forests. Thus, to provide a proper amount, place the plant’s pot on a tray of pebbles filled with water. Other alternatives are to sit the plant near an open bowl of water. If you mist them, use distilled water to prevent spots and only mist the leaves.

If you have patience, you can likely enjoy future flowers when your plant reblooms. But you’ll need to find out some details of your Flower of the Month’s particular genus to know what triggers will allow that to happen. For example, Phalaenopsis rebloom based on temperature. After a period of time, you’ll begin to see new bloom spikes once nights begin to cool off as long as the plant continues to get enough light. With the Cattleya genus, however, light is the trigger. Keep these plants out of artificial light after daylight hours to encourage new blooms.