

Potted Phalaenopsis Orchid Production: History, Present Status, and Challenges for the Future

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During the Victorian period, orchids were popular houseplants. Phalaenopsis orchids (*Phalaenopsis* Blume.) were grown; however, they were rare because of the difficulty in bringing them into cultivation. Most plants did not survive the long journey from the jungle to greenhouses on other continents. At the turn-of-the-century, the Victorian popularity of potted house plants waned. Orchid growing shifted from potted-plants to cut-flowers. This trend continued until the 1960s, when potted-plants became popular again. Unlike in the Victorian era, phalaenopsis orchids have become widely available due to improved transportation and new seed propagation techniques. Because the plants are easy to grow and flower in the home environment, their popularity has grown tremendously.

Breeding for the mass-market is very different than breeding for the hobbyist or cut-flower markets. In the hobbyist and cut-flower markets, emphasis is placed exclusively on floral traits (round, full, and flat flowers; unique colors; etc.) while in the mass-market, vegetative characteristics are of nearly equal importance with floral traits. The first phalaenopsis orchids that were sold in mass-market were cut-flower hybrids that were selected for more compact growth and flowering. The development of hybrids specifically for this market is in its infancy.

Today, phalaenopsis orchids are the most widely grown orchid. Statistical data from the Netherlands show that from 1983 to 1994, the number of potted phalaenopsis sold through the auction at Aalsmeer steadily increased from 50,000 to 3,150,000 plants. In 1983, phalaenopsis accounted for less than 5% of the market; while in 1994, they accounted for over 66% of the market. At the same time, the production of all the other orchids decreased. Large scale, potted phalaenopsis production is taking place in China, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and United States.