# *Carter and Holmes Orchids*

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*Why You Should NOT, Just Add Ice*

By now, many orchid growers, beginners and experienced alike, have heard the theory about watering orchids with ice cubes. In case you haven’t, it goes something like this.

*“Water your Orchid with three ice cubes a week and it will be happy as can be!”*

Sadly, though it may be given with the best of intentions, this advice is problematic and has caused a lot of misinformation to be spread online and through social media. The kernel of truth in the “Just Add Ice” myth/marketing gimmick is that most people who kill orchids do so by over-watering them. But it’s not the amount of water people use when watering orchids that leads to over-watering, it’s how long the roots stay wet.

Remember where your orchid is from. Plants known as “Ice Orchids” are simply Phalaenopsis Orchids or ‘Moth Orchids’ that originated in tropical Southeast Asia. They are intermediate to warm growing, which means their native environment is usually a minimum of 60 degrees anytime of year. Not really ‘ice cube’ type weather.

Phalaenopsis in nature grow attached to trees, shrubs or outcroppings with their roots exposed, They are watered frequently by rainfall, but because their roots don’t have much around them to hold water, they dry out between waterings. Their roots need humidity but should not stay soggy.

We always suggest watering potted orchids thoroughly from the top of the pot, with room temperature or tepid water. Water well enough to saturate the media so that is stays damp for a minimum of 4-5 days or as long as 7-10 days.

This number won’t be exact because it varies with the amount of light, humidity and airflow and with the temperature where they are grown. If your plant is staying wet for longer than 10-14 days, then additional airflow may be needed. If your potted orchid needs water more than twice per week, then not enough water is being given or it’s time to consider repotting (see our Repotting Information here). If the mix is very dry on watering day, water well and come back twenty minutes later and water again. This helps the outer layer of bark, mulch or moss absorb the moisture better. Plus, it flushes free any water impurities or fertilizer salts that collect in the pot.

This wet-dry cycle is needed in one form or another for many of the most commonly found orchids. Adding a few cubes to the top of the media does not address the need to thoroughly water the roots and potting media. As the ice melts, some water trickles into the pots, but not enough to really provide humidity or flush the potting mix of any water impurities or fertilizer salts. Also, remember, these are tropical plants. The ice is likely to cause damage to the roots and foliage.act with.

Ice cubes may work for some growers for a while, but they are not what your Phalaenopsis needs long term. “Ice Orchids” fit with the marketing strategy of box stores, grocery stores and hardware stores today that sell orchids as a ‘disposable’ alternative to cut flowers. The flowers last longer than a bouquet of cut flowers, and since they are usually very cost friendly, if they die in 6-12 months many people are ok with replacing them. We teach our visitors and new customers how to care for Orchids with an eye to the future. Orchids can be a long-term investment that produce a lot of joy. Bringing your well-grown orchid into bloom year after year can be extremely rewarding.

So just remember, your orchid doesn’t like taking an ice bath anymore than you do!