



ESSEX

ORCHID SOCIETY

Growing together, sharing knowledge, inspiring passion

OCTOBER
NEWSLETTER
2026

Welcome To Our October Newsletter

Autumn is here, bringing shorter days and cooler temperatures. It is time to prepare our orchids and growing spaces for winter by checking heaters, reducing watering, improving air circulation and making the most of the available light. It is also worth checking plants carefully for pests before they are moved closer together.

It was wonderful to welcome everyone back at our September meeting. Ray's fascinating presentation on the Victorian obsession with orchids was followed by an excellent Show and Tell, with members sharing a beautiful selection of blooms and their growing experiences.

In this issue, we meet another member of our orchid growing community and explore how orchids can support our wellbeing. We also look at the benefits of reverse osmosis water, particularly for orchids that are sensitive to the minerals found in tap water.

Our Genus in the Spotlight is Paphiopedilum, best known for its distinctive slipper shaped flowers. We also look forward to October's presentation by Zsuzsa Serer from Spicesotic. We hope you enjoy this edition and look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

The Essex Orchid Society Committee

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NEXT MEETING

Saturday 10th October 2026

***Plants in Flower in the Nursery
& Their Care - Zsuzsa Serer***



Doors open 1:30pm
Meeting 2:00pm -
4:00pm



South Green Memorial
Hall,
Billericay, CM11 2PR



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Essex Orchid Society

Preparing Your Orchids for Winter



As autumn settles in and the nights become colder, now is the time to prepare our orchids for winter. Most Society members grow at least part of their collection indoors, while others use greenhouses, conservatories or converted sheds. Wherever they grow, the aim is the same: enough warmth and light without the damp, stagnant conditions that cause trouble in winter.

Bring tender orchids indoors

Bring any orchids that spent the summer outside before it gets too cold, starting with warm growers like Phalaenopsis. Check pots, leaves and flower spikes for slugs, snails, scale and mealybugs, looking under the leaves and around the base. If you can, keep them apart from the rest of your collection for a while. Avoid sudden temperature changes. Moving a plant straight from a cool garden into a warm room can stress it, so go gradually via a porch, conservatory or cooler room.

Insulate the growing space

In a greenhouse or shed, good insulation keeps the temperature steadier and cuts heating bills. Use UV-stabilised horticultural bubble wrap with large bubbles, ideally around 25mm, fitted neatly across the glass with the joins overlapped and fixed down so warm air can't escape. Don't forget the floor, which stays very cold and chills pots on lower benches. Insulated flooring or removable rubber matting can help, as long as drainage and electrical safety aren't affected. Check around doors, vents and window frames for gaps, but don't seal the space so tightly that no fresh air gets in. Test heaters, thermostats and fans before the first frost. A max/min thermometer is handy for spotting overnight drops. Warm growers need the most protection, though the ideal minimum depends on the genus.

Make the most of winter light

In a British winter, light is often a bigger problem than temperature. Once the strong autumn sun has passed, remove any summer shade paint and clean the glass before fitting insulation. Large-bubble wrap softens the weaker winter sun, so you shouldn't need extra shading. Indoors, move orchids closer to a bright window, but keep leaves off cold glass and out of draughts. Wipe dust from the leaves so plants make the most of the light. If natural light is poor, an LED grow light on a timer can help, especially for Cattleas and other higher-light orchids.

Adjust watering carefully

With less light and slower growth, many orchids need less water. Check each pot rather than watering everything on autopilot. Water early in the day so leaves and crowns are dry before night, and use room temperature water. Not every orchid wants a dry winter rest. Paphiopediums have no pseudobulbs to store water, so they shouldn't dry out completely, while some Dendrobiums do better with a cooler, drier rest. Central heating can dry out indoor rooms more than you'd expect. Humidity trays, grouping plants or a humidifier may help, but good air movement still matters. A small fan on a gentle setting keeps damp air from settling around the leaves without a cold blast.

Leave repotting until spring

Unless the compost has badly broken down, the roots are rotting or there's another urgent problem, don't repot in winter. Orchids recover slowly in low light and cool temperatures, and damaged roots stay wet longer. For most actively growing orchids, spring and the first new roots are a safer time. A little preparation now can head off many winter problems. Aim for steady temperatures, plenty of light, careful watering and gentle air movement, then keep an eye on your plants. They'll tell you what they need.

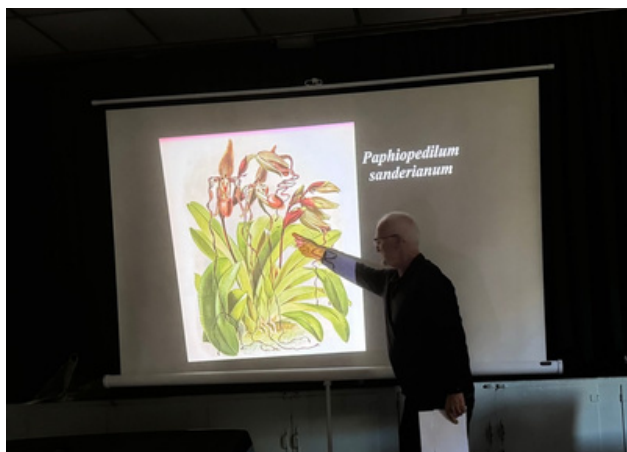
The care guidance is informed by the RHS recommendations

Highlights From Our September Meeting

Ray's Victorian orchid story, shared growing tips and a splendid show bench

September's meeting took us into the Victorian age of 'Orchidellrium', when rare orchids became symbols of wealth and collectors competed for the newest discoveries. Ray told how William Swainson sent orchids from Brazil and William Cattley flowed Cattley labiata in 1818. Its large, fragrant blooms caused a sensation, and John Lindley later named the genus in Cattley's honour.

We also heard about the Duke of Devonshire's vast Great Stove at Chatsworth, James Bateman's illustrated orchid books and Frederick Sander, the 'Orchid King'. The enormous Veitch nurseries and the eye-watering prices paid for plants showed just how intense the passion became before the world wars changed orchid growing for good.



A meeting shaped by members

When Ray had to leave, Moira stepped in to chair the rest of the meeting and did a great job keeping everything running smoothly. Our Show and Tell then brought the focus back to the plants we grow today, with Wendy, Mary and Ram talking about their orchids and sharing some very useful tips.



Show bench and thanks

Richard kindly stepped in to judge the excellent displays that members brought along. Wendy managed the raffle which rounded off the afternoon and raised welcome funds for the Society, so thank you to everyone who donated prizes or bought tickets. Sue provided the refreshments, while Mike kept the library well stocked and ready for members to browse, as ever.

Meet Our Member - Wendy Webster

A birthday gift in 2016 began Wendy's orchid collection. Today she grows 21 plants, mostly on an east facing windowsill in her kitchen and dining room. We asked her about the orchids that mean most to her and the lessons she has learned along the way.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Her close friend Penny gave Wendy a couple of orchids for her birthday. They thrived, and Wendy was hooked. Friends and family noticed how well the plants were doing and more orchids arrived as presents.

A FAVOURITE GENUS

Phalaenopsis are Wendy's favourites - no surprise there given the plants brought in for table shows. She loves their magnificent flowers and the range of colours, patterns and sizes. Just as importantly, they seem very happy in her home.



Wendy with one of her Phalaenopsis



Most of Wendy's orchids grow by the east facing kitchen and dining room windows.



AN ORCHID WITH A STORY

One little white flowering Phalaenopsis has a special place in Wendy's collection. Her friend Penny gave it to her in 2017, while Penny's husband was ill. Penny still visits and checks how the orchid is doing. It is a living reminder of her friend's kindness.

Meet Our Member - Wendy Webster



A REWARDING RESCUE

Wendy particularly enjoys bringing other people's struggling orchids back to health. One of her cousin's plants was almost lost when Wendy took it in. Once she has nursed it back into flower, her cousin is keen to take it home again.

HER MOST USEFUL LESSON

Do not overwater. Wendy has learned that an orchid's need for humidity does not mean its potting mix should stay wet, especially during winter. She checks the plant and its growing conditions before deciding what it needs.

ADVICE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

"Join the orchid club" was the best advice Wendy received. Her sister bought her membership to the Essex Orchid Society (probably the best society in the world), and she has never looked back. Wendy also recommends looking up an unfamiliar orchid in a book and checking its preferred conditions before adding it to a collection.

QUICK FIRE WITH WENDY

Favourite orchid	Phalaenopsis
Most rewarding genus	Phalaenopsis
Most challenging genus	Oncidium
Tea or coffee in the greenhouse?	Tea
Watering time	Usually morning

Wendy's book recommendation: The Happy Orchid - Help It Flower, Watch It Flourish by Sara Rittershausen.

Dream orchid: None in particular, she enjoys discovering whatever comes along.

WHAT KEEPS WENDY GROWING?

The joy of seeing an orchid flower again, and the challenge of helping it get there. Each new bloom makes the care and patience worthwhile.

Orchids and Wellbeing

Being a clinician by background and having worked in acute and mental health services, the one thing I saw again and again was how much an absorbing, hands on interest could do for a person. Orchid growing is a good example. It asks for patience and attention, and it gives something back.

The research on orchids alone is limited, but there is a good body of evidence on gardening and plants in general. A large review of gardening studies found links with lower levels of depression and anxiety, better quality of life and a stronger sense of community. Other studies have found that time spent gardening after a stressful task brought stress levels down more effectively than reading indoors. Small trials with indoor plants have suggested similar calming effects. Most of this shows a link rather than proof of cause, but it matches what many of us know from experience.

Part of the appeal is the way plants hold our attention. Checking a root, noticing a new spike or misting a leaf takes just enough concentration to quiet a busy mind, without the pressure of a demanding task. It is a gentle way of being in the present moment, which is much of what mindfulness aims for. There is also a real sense of achievement in getting a plant to flower again, and orchids reward patience like few others. The routine helps too. Regular care gives structure to the week and a reason to get up and go and look.

The Editor



I have seen this closer to home. My mum has real difficulty with her memory these days. She can lose track of what happened that morning, and names and dates slip away. But put an orchid in front of her and it is a different story. She has grown them since she was young, and she can tell you what it is, how it likes to be watered and what it needs to flower. Skills learned over a lifetime seem to be held in a different way from recent events, and the pleasure of talking about something she knows so well is plain to see. It gives her confidence, and for a little while she is entirely herself.

You don't need a clinical reason to enjoy your orchids, but it is nice to know they may be doing you good. If you know someone who is feeling low, isolated or struggling to focus, an orchid or an invitation to one of our society meetings may be a kinder first step than you'd think.

Should You Use RO Water on Your Orchids?

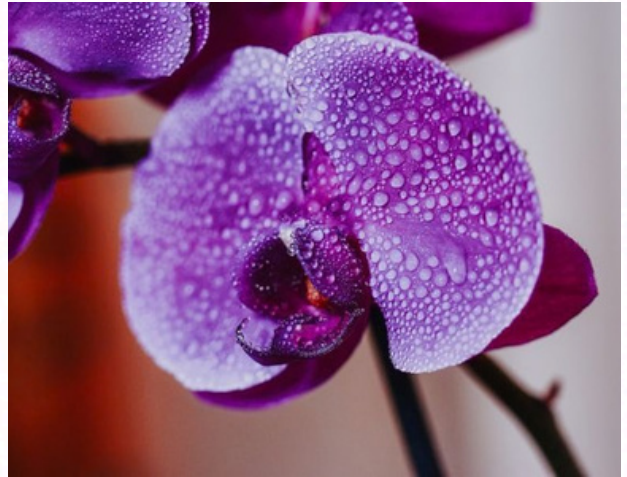
In the wild, orchids don't drink from a tap. They get rain and morning dew, which is very soft, very clean water.⁶ Reverse osmosis (RO) is the closest most of us can get at home. A home unit pushes tap water through a very fine membrane that blocks up to 99% of the dissolved minerals,¹ leaving water that is close to rain. Here's a practical guide to the benefits, the caveats, and what makes most sense for growers in Essex.

Why it helps

Tap water, especially in hard water areas like Essex, is full of calcium, sodium, chloride and other salts. These build up in the growing mix over time and can eventually harm the roots.² The same minerals also push up the water's conductivity. Add fertiliser on top and the total can get high enough to scorch roots.³ Starting with RO water leaves you room to feed your plants properly. Growers of fussy plants like slipper orchids are some of its biggest fans.⁴

The bottom line

You don't need RO to grow good orchids. If your tap water is soft, or you collect rainwater, you may not need it at all. Plenty of orchids also die from overwatering, whatever water is used.⁵ But if you see white crust on your pots or burnt leaf tips, or you grow something fussy, RO is worth a look. **In Essex, it's either rain water or RO and definitely not tap water!**



The catches

RO water is almost empty, so everything the plant needs has to come from you. Use a complete fertiliser that includes trace minerals to replace what RO takes out.⁴ Some growers pick one made for rain or RO water.²

RO water also has no buffering, so the pH can swing. One grower mixes in 10% tap water to steady it.²

Running costs are low, but the system wastes water. Older units used four gallons of water to make one gallon of pure water, though newer ones are much better.¹ The waste water is fine for the garden or less fussy plants. The membrane needs replacing now and then, and a cheap meter measuring water going in and out tells you when.⁷

References

1. American Orchid Society. "Water Your Orchids." aos.org/orchids/articles/water-your-orchids
2. Orchid Karma. "Finally a reverse osmosis system." orchidkarma.com/finally-a-reverse-osmosis-system/
3. OrchidTalk forum. "Benefits to using rain water?" rv-orchidworks.com/orchidtalk/showthread.php?p=241078
4. Slippertalk forum. "Water quality for Paphs." slippertalk.com/threads/water-quality-for-paphs.19618/latest
5. Viomi. "RO water for orchid care." water.viomi.com/blogs/hydration-lab/ro-water-for-orchid-care
6. OrchidTalk forum. Discussion of RO, deionised and distilled water. rv-orchidworks.com/orchidtalk/showthread.php?p=395782
7. Orchid Karma. "R/O system" post. orchidkarma.com/?p=1463

Genus Spotlight - Paphiopedilum

Native across tropical and subtropical Asia, Paphiopedilum are among the most distinctive orchids in cultivation. Their pouch-shaped lip gives them the familiar name of slipper orchids, while the striped, spotted or twisting petals make each flower unmistakable. Most grow as terrestrials or lithophytes in leaf litter and humus, often over limestone. They reward careful watering and stable conditions with exceptionally long lasting blooms.

The Plants

Paphiopedilum grow in fans and do not produce pseudobulbs, so they cannot store much water. Leaves may be plain green or attractively mottled. Most mature growths flower once, then new fans take over. Some types carry a single large bloom, sequential hybrids open one flower after another, and multifloral species can hold several flowers at once. A well grown flower may remain attractive for six to twelve weeks

Cultivations

Temperature: Plain green-leaved types generally prefer cooler conditions, with winter minimums around 10–13°C. Mottled-leaved plants and multiflorals prefer warmer nights. Many modern hybrids grow happily at normal household temperatures.

Watering and feeding: Keep the medium lightly moist but never waterlogged. Because there are no pseudobulbs, prolonged dryness quickly damages the roots. Water less in winter, but do not allow the pot to dry completely. Use low-mineral water where possible, feed lightly, and flush the pot regularly to prevent salt build-up.

Medium: A fine or medium bark mix with perlite, pumice or a little chopped sphagnum gives moisture retention with good drainage. Use the smallest pot that comfortably holds the roots. Repot after flowering, usually from February to June, or whenever the mix starts to break down.

Light and air: Provide filtered light in summer and brighter, unshaded light in winter. An east or west window suits many indoor plants. Gentle air movement helps prevent spotting and rot, especially around the crown.

Humidity: Moderate humidity of about 40–60% suits most plants. Indoors, a humidifier or a tray of damp gravel can help, but the pot itself should never stand in water. Good air movement becomes more important as humidity rises.

After flowering: Cut a finished flower stem near its base unless the plant is a sequential bloomer such as P. Pinocchio. The old stem will not flower again, but should remain until new growths mature because it continues to support the plant.

Buying plants: Choose nursery-propagated plants from a reputable supplier and retain the label. Paphiopedilum are heavily protected in international trade.



Paphiopedilum barbatum - courtesy of a society member

Species and Hybrids To Try

- P. Insigne Cool Tolerant classic; winter flowering
- P. Maudiae Warm-Int Mottled leaves; excellent indoors
- P. Pinocchio Warm-Int Sequential flowers over many months
- P. delenatii Warm-Int Compact; soft pink to white flowers
- P. rothschildianum Int-Warm Spectacular multifloral; slow and large

Troubleshooting

Failure to flower: The plant may be immature or receiving too little light. Check that the leaves are not very dark green and that the temperature suits the type.

Brown leaf tips: Salt build-up, hard water or damaged roots are common causes. Flush the pot thoroughly and review feeding strength.

Rot at the crown or leaf bases: Water trapped in cool, still conditions encourages rot. Water early in the day, keep the crown dry and improve air movement.

Root loss: Old, compacted mix or constant saturation deprives roots of air. Remove dead roots, repot into fresh open medium and use a pot no larger than necessary.

The Monthly Triple Dose / What's Coming Up

The Monthly Triple Dose

Three Orchid Stories That You Need To Know

1. *Gastrodia keyiensis*, a new holomycotrophic species

Researchers have formally described *Gastrodia keyiensis*, a rare leafless orchid from a remote gorge along the Keyi River in Keyi Panyor district, Arunachal Pradesh, Eastern Himalayas. It has no chlorophyll and lives entirely on nutrients from fungi in the forest floor (holomycotrophy). Only five flowering plants were found. The species was published in *Phytotaxa* on 9 September 2026 as *Gastrodia keyiensis* (Orchidaceae: Gastrodieae)

2. Costa Rica's escalating fight against orchid smuggling

A feature published this week (21 September) reports that Costa Rican authorities have seen wildlife-crime cases referred for scientific identification rise 330% since 2023, with orchids among the most frequently seized plants in one case, over 300 wild orchids were found in a single traveller's suitcase. It's a timely reminder of why buying only nursery-propagated plants matters.

3. The Orchid Society of Great Britain turns 75

Founded in 1951, the OSGB, the UK's largest orchid society is marking its 75th anniversary throughout 2026, with anniversary events tied into its usual calendar of Spring/Autumn shows and its presence at RHS displays. Worth a mention given how many Essex Orchid Society members are likely also OSGB-affiliated or attend the same shows.

Next Presentation

Saturday 10 October 2026

Plants in Flower in the Nursery and Their Care

Zsuzsa Serer (Spicesotic)

Zsuzsa will be sharing a wonderful selection of plants currently in flower at the nursery, along with practical advice on their care. This promises to be an inspiring and informative talk – don't miss it!



What's Coming Up?

In November's newsletter we'll be looking at:

- Location, location, location - does it matter when holding orchid shows?
- November culture reset: less water, more humidity, cooler nights
- A Christmas Gift Guide for An Orchid Addict
- And more....

Would You Join a Society WhatsApp Group?

We are considering setting up an optional Essex Orchid Society WhatsApp group to help members keep in touch between our monthly meetings. It would not replace our emails or newsletter, but would offer a quicker and more informal way to share news and enjoy our orchids together.

Joining would be entirely optional, and members would only be added with their permission. If this is something you would find useful, please let your promotion officer or a member of the committee know.

Orchid Events Calendar

Looking for orchid shows, talks, and events near and far? Check out Pumpkin Beth's Orchid Events page for an up-to-date list:

www.pumpkinbeth.com/events

Orchid Trivia

Answers from the September Issue:

Which orchid genus is often known as the "vanilla orchid"?

The Genus is Vanilla

Orchids are found on every continent except Antarctica.

Correct!

We would love members to help shape future editions of the newsletter.

Please send us photographs of your orchids, growing spaces or recent successes, along with any useful tips or stories you would like to share.

We would also welcome suggestions about the subjects, features or Society news you would like to see covered.

Please send your contributions and ideas to our Promotion Officer, Ramesh, at ramesh@rajah.info