

GROWING ORCHIDS IN THE CITY

CINDY COTY

JAMIE FANG LEE has spent her whole life with orchids. Her family founded the internationally known Norman's Orchids in Montclair, California, and Orchids.com run by her brothers Norman and Eric Fang. Jamie carved out her own niche, realizing that she had an aptitude for floral design, and she began selling orchid plants and arrangements from a small shop in the Los Angeles Flower Market. Over time, she grew her business, Orchid Affair, to fill a 5,000 square foot shop. She creates small to very elaborate orchid arrangements for homes, film studios, and the Hollywood elite.

The Flower Market is headquartered in downtown Los Angeles, quite a distance from Montclair. Even though Jamie's day begins very early (4 am!), all the stories you hear about LA traffic are true and always an Angelino's concern. To simplify her life, Jamie decided to live in a downtown condo rather than commute from Montclair, where the rest of the Fang clan reside. Even though she is now semi-retired, orchids still retain an active place in her life.

Jamie's office is now in her downtown condo. She felt the absence of orchids around her, so she decided to find a way to grow them in her home. Her condo was on the ground floor with a lovely patio and trees for privacy fronting on a busy downtown street. Consequently, there was not much light available to grow orchids.

The office had built-in bookshelves, and Jamie decided to turn them into her growing area; however, lighting was an issue. Full Spectrum Plus Optimum Orchid LED grow lights, supplied by Jeff Young, owner of The Orchid Hobbyist, provided the solution she required. These LEDs are designed specifically for growing orchids and other houseplants. The difference is the spectrum and housing. The lights are full-spectrum with the addition of red, and the housing complements rigorous requirements for the botanical environment. These LEDs are 2:1. Two parts full-spectrum white light (6500k) to one-part red LED. The advantage of this red LED is that chlorophyll strongly absorbs the red light, and it can stimulate flowering. These LEDs have 10%+ Far RED (730 nm).

Jamie installed the lights on the upper part of each shelf for proper lighting and placed her plants (mostly phalaenopsis) in attractive pots to make the bookshelves a decorative addition to the room. The lights are lightweight and easy to hang. Each LED weighs only several ounces. The light that comes off these LEDs is white. If you look directly at the LEDs, you see some of the LEDs are red, but it is white when you put your hand under the light.

Jamie commented, "The new LED lights are a great improvement over traditional lighting. The heat gener-

ated by older lighting would have prevented me from using them so close to the plants. Now the plants and flowers can nearly touch the lights without worrying about damage, and the plants grow and bloom well under them." Orchids do their photosynthesis during the day but complete the process during the night cycle, so Jamie leaves the LEDs on for 12-16 hours and turns them off at night. Another plus is the LEDs only use a fraction of energy compared to fluorescent tubing or bulbs. The expected lifespan of the LEDs is 50,000 hours of operation, although it is recommended that you replace them every five years.

Jamie recently purchased the penthouse unit in the same apartment complex. The new condominium is on the corner of the building, so it is very light and open and has some great views of LA, including the Griffith Park Observatory and the Hollywood sign.

With all the available light, Jamie is now able to grow and display orchids everywhere, including out on the generous wrap-around balcony. Sections of the balcony have become growing areas for many plants and provide a calming feel in the middle of the city. Jamie has also created a small area as a sanctuary to sit in



Shelves with full-spectrum grow lights.

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Phalaenopsis growing on shelves under full-spectrum grow lights.

her rocking chair and relax, surrounded by her plants.

The new office is larger with more shelf space and more ambient light. Jamie has duplicated the “growing area bookshelves” in this office. She has added more plants on the counter surfaces near the windows since



Paphiopedilum haynaldianum decorating the living area.

the ambient light is good enough for the phals. Deeper in the office, where there is less light, some decorative lights are used for supplemental lighting to grow more orchids.

Jamie takes care of watering by watching the moisture levels in the pots. The moss medium, in which the orchids are potted, retains water, and about every ten days to two weeks, when the media dries out, the plants get taken to the kitchen sink. There she ensures that the media in each pot is completely saturated with water. They are fertilized at every watering with one-third strength fertilizer, and after draining well, are returned to their decorative pots. They are misted between waterings with Mega Thrive, a special foliar fertilizer formulated to promote vigorous growth. Jamie’s husband Roger calls himself “the chief mister.” The LED lights can get wet while misting!

Growing in bookshelves takes some effort but having beautiful orchids in your living and workspace has its own rewards.*

About the Author

Cindy Coty is a long-time judge in the American Orchid Society, and past regional judging chair of the Pacific South Judging region. In real life, Cindy provides business development consulting help for companies in the biotechnology and in vitro diagnostics industries.



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