People may be wary of orchids because of perceptions that they are difficult to grow and require a lot of effort for only one bloom per year. This is not always the case. Many species and hybrids of orchids grow well in Florida and flower profusely with minimum care.

Orchids come in a wide variety of colors, sizes, and styles. A beginner orchid enthusiast should ask the following questions:

- How much time can I spend on orchids?
- How much money is available?
- Do I have or am I willing to build a hobby greenhouse?
- Do I have a suitable growing area for the orchids?

The answers to these questions will help determine what type of orchids you should grow. However, there are six types of orchids recommended because of their adaptability, ease of growing and beautiful flowers: Cattleya, Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium, Oncidium, Vanda and Epidendrum.

Most orchids require partial shade for optimum growth and flowering. High light intensities can cause the foliage to yellow and may bum the leaves. Growing the plants in the shade of trees, in a shaded greenhouse, under eaves of houses or on a patio is recommended.

Orchids are not grown in soil. They have traditionally been grown in clay pots with osmunda fiber. Osmunda fiber can be expensive, so other media such as chopped tree fern fiber, bark materials, porous stone (volcanic stone), peat, charcoal and combinations of these materials can be used successfully. Plastic pots also can be used in place of clay ones.

The type of growing media and pot used will depend on how often the orchids need water. For example, osmunda fiber and peat moss have a much greater water-holding capability than charcoal or stone.

How often should orchids be watered? This is one question to which there is no one set answer. Watering frequency depends on pot size and type (plastic or clay), growing media, location of the pot (hanging or bench), size of the plant in the pot, air circulation, shade levels and general environment in the growing area.

As a general rule, plants grown in small pots dry more rapidly than those grown in large pots, therefore requiring water more frequently. Also, plants grown in porous clay pots should receive water more often than those grown in plastic pots. When watering, saturate each pot so that moisture drains from the bottom of the pot and then do not water again until the surface of the medium becomes dry.

Fertilization is required for orchids in order to obtain maximum flowering, and they need to be protected from cold. Temperatures below 50°F can damage orchids. Like other plants, orchids are susceptible to a number of insect and disease problems. You can begin an orchid collection inexpensively and support local county 4-H clubs. Osceola County 4-H youths will hold their annual orchid sale from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 18. Phalaenopsis orchids, available in pink or white, will be sold for $12 at Osceola Heritage Park, Courthouse Square in Kissimmee, and at the Beaumont Avenue government complex in Kissimmee. People may order them by calling the Osceola County 4-H Foundation at 321-697-3000.