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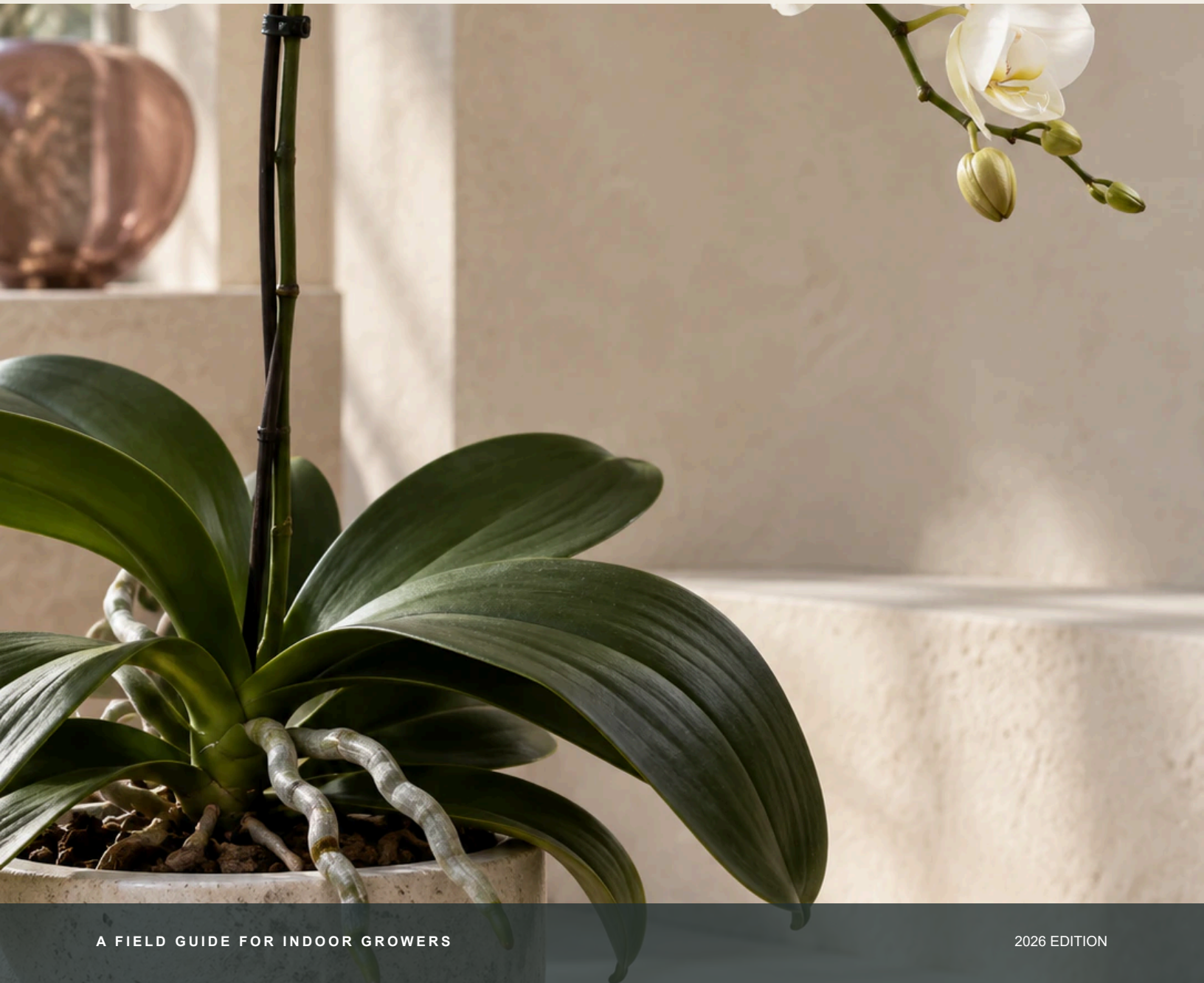
COLLECTOR GUIDE

# The Moth Orchid Guide

*Phalaenopsis hybrids*



A FIELD GUIDE FOR INDOOR GROWERS

2026 EDITION

# How to use this guide

The color of the roots. The weight of the pot. The condition of the bark. The pace of a bud. Good care begins by noticing what changed before deciding what to do.

THE ONE-CHANGE RULE

Change one condition. Record what happened. Give the plant time to answer.

# Contents

| PLANT IDENTITY | |
|---|---|
| BOTANICAL | *Phalaenopsis* species |
| FAMILY | Orchidaceae |
| ORIGIN | Tropical and subtropical Asia to northeast Australia |
| HABIT | Monopodial epiphytic herb |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**HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

Start with the condition you can observe. Avoid making several changes at once. The printable log at the end is part of the care system, not an afterthought.

# Plant profile

Moth Orchids are tropical epiphytes with broad, succulent leaves, thick photosynthetic roots, and long-lasting flowers carried on arching spikes. Most plants sold for indoor growing are complex *Phalaenopsis* hybrids whose flower color, size, and seasonal timing vary.

# Care at a glance

Bright filtered light, steady warmth, moving air, and an open root zone. Let the roots and bark help determine when water is useful.

**LIGHT**

Give it bright filtered light. An east window is often ideal; shade strong south or west exposure.

**WATER**

Water thoroughly when the bark is nearly dry and exposed roots look silvery. Never leave the pot standing in water.

**HUMIDITY**

Aim for moderate humidity with gentle air movement. Keep the crown dry overnight.

**WARMTH**

Warm days and nights above 60°F (16°C) suit most hybrids. Abrupt changes can cause buds to drop.

**MEDIUM**

Use a porous orchid medium, usually fine- to medium-grade bark, in a ventilated container that drains freely.

**UPKEEP**

Inspect roots through a clear pot, keep the crown clear, and watch for scale or mealybugs.

**THE RELIABLE DEFAULT**

Choose bright filtered light. Water the bark thoroughly when it is nearly dry, then drain completely.

# Light

Window direction is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, season, curtains, and distance all change the light that reaches the orchid.

### TOO INTENSE

Yellow-green foliage, pale patches, or dry scorch after exposure to hot direct sun.

### USEFUL RANGE

Bright filtered light supports firm leaves and repeat flowering. An east window is a useful starting point.

### TOO DIM

Very dark green leaves, little active root growth, or a mature plant that repeatedly fails to initiate a spike.

### ADJUST SLOWLY

Move the plant in stages. Sudden changes can burn or stress established leaves.

> **PROTECT THE BUDS**
>
> Once buds form, avoid abrupt changes in light, temperature, moisture, or location. A stable environment lowers the risk of bud blast.

# Placement

Choose bright filtered light, often near an east window. Keep leaves from touching cold or hot glass, and protect buds from heating vents, air-conditioning, and sudden moves.

# Watering

Water the full root zone with lukewarm water when the bark is nearly dry. Morning watering gives stray moisture time to evaporate.

Saturate the bark, let the pot drain freely, and keep standing water out of the decorative outer pot.

## 01

### CHECK THE ROOTS

Silvery exposed roots, nearly dry bark, and a lighter pot suggest it is time. Green roots and damp bark suggest waiting.

## 02

### WATER EVENLY

Use lukewarm water and wet the bark thoroughly. Do not use ice cubes or rely on a few small splashes.

## 03

### LET IT FINISH

Drain completely, empty the cachepot, and wick any water trapped in the crown or leaf joints.

# Humidity and temperature

Moderate humidity supports active roots and buds, but it must be paired with gentle air movement and a ventilated root zone.

| | |
|---|---|
| **WARM ROOMS** | Most hybrids prefer nights above 60°F (16°C) and days around 75-85°F (24-29°C). Protect buds from abrupt temperature changes. |
| **HUMIDITY** | Aim for roughly 50-80% humidity. A room humidifier or pebble tray can help, provided the pot never sits in water. |
| **WINTER** | Cooler, darker rooms slow drying. Check bark, root color, and pot weight instead of keeping a fixed calendar. |

**HUMIDITY IS NOT WETNESS**

Moist air can be useful. Stagnant air, a wet crown, and waterlogged bark are not.

# Potting medium and fertilizer

Coarse, porous orchid medium and a ventilated pot keep air moving around thick epiphytic roots.

### POTTING MEDIUM

Choose a porous orchid medium, usually fine- to medium-grade bark for indoor plants. Avoid ordinary potting soil, decomposed bark, oversized pots, and sealed containers.

### FERTILIZER

Use a balanced orchid fertilizer at a weak labeled concentration during active growth. Periodically flush with plain water to limit salt buildup, and reduce feeding in cool, dark conditions.

# Moth Orchid anatomy

Numbered markers correspond to the definitions at right.

**1 LEAF BLADE**

A broad, succulent organ that photosynthesizes and stores a limited reserve of water.

**2 CROWN**

The central growing point where new leaves emerge; trapped water here can encourage rot.

**3 FLOWER SPIKE**

The arching inflorescence that carries buds and flowers.

**4 NODE**

A joint on the flower spike capable of producing a branch, flower, or occasional keiki.

**5 AERIAL ROOT**

A thick root covered by absorbent velamen; it often turns green when wet and silvery as it dries.

**6 FLOWER**

Three sepals and two petals frame a specialized lip and central column.

# Bloom and foliage care

### READ ROOTS AND LEAVES

Wrinkled leaves can reflect dry bark or damaged roots. Inspect the root system before responding with more water.

### KEEP THE CROWN CLEAR

Water in the morning and remove water trapped between leaves. Avoid oils, leaf polish, and repeated misting into the crown.

### SUPPORT WITHOUT PINCHING

Use loose orchid clips on a slim stake. Guide a developing spike gradually rather than forcing a sharp bend.

### AFTER THE FLOWERS FADE

A green spike may branch from an unused node; a dry brown spike should be removed near its base with clean tools.

> **ABOUT DYED FLOWERS**
>
> Some white-flowering orchids are sold after artificial dyeing. If the plant reblooms, the new flowers normally return to their natural color.

# Troubleshooting

Check the pattern, the root zone, and the recent change before reaching for a remedy.

| WHAT YOU SEE | WHAT TO INSPECT | FIRST RESPONSE |
|---|---|---|
| Wrinkled or limp leaves | Dry bark, damaged roots, decomposed medium, or a root system kept too wet. | Inspect roots and medium before changing the watering frequency. |
| Bud drop | Recent shifts in temperature, location, moisture, humidity, or fertilizer. | Stabilize the environment and protect remaining buds from drafts. |
| Black or soft crown | Water trapped between leaves, cool stagnant conditions, or spreading decay. | Keep the crown dry and seek experienced orchid help promptly. |
| Leaf scorch | Hot direct sun, contact with glass, or a sudden move into stronger light. | Move to filtered light and judge recovery by undamaged growth. |
| Scale or mealybugs | Leaf undersides, the crown, flower spike joints, and the base of clips. | Separate the plant, confirm the pest, and follow a labeled treatment. |

**DO NOT STACK REMEDIES**

Extra water, fertilizer, repotting, spike cutting, pesticide, and a new location applied together can increase stress and erase the evidence. Change one condition at a time unless roots or the crown are actively failing.

# Repotting

Healthy roots are firm and plump, often silver, green, or pale cream; dead roots are brown, hollow, brittle, or soft.

## 01
### PREPARE

Choose a clear ventilated pot that fits the roots without a large reservoir of empty medium.

## 02
### INSPECT

Remove decomposed bark gently. Preserve firm roots and trim only roots that are clearly dead or rotted.

## 03
### SET

Set the root-stem junction at the surface and work fresh bark among the roots without burying the crown.

## 04
### SETTLE

Stabilize the plant without packing bark tightly. Water according to root condition and let the pot drain completely.

### WHEN TO ACT

Repot after flowering when bark has decomposed, roots are failing, or the plant has outgrown its pot. For many indoor plants this is roughly every one to three years.

# Propagation

Moth Orchids are not normally divided like orchids with rhizomes. Home propagation is most practical when the plant naturally produces a rooted keiki.

Leave a keiki attached until it has several leaves and multiple roots long enough to support the young plant.

## 01
### WAIT

Do not remove a new plantlet as soon as it appears. Let it build several leaves and a useful root system.

## 02
### CONFIRM

Look for several healthy leaves and multiple well-developed roots. If the roots are short or fragile, leave the keiki attached longer.

## 03
### SEPARATE

Use a sterile blade to cut the mature keiki from the spike while protecting its roots and crown.

## 04
### POT SMALL

Use a small ventilated pot and fine orchid medium. Keep warm, humid, and gently ventilated while roots establish.

> **DO NOT FORCE THE ISSUE**
>
> A healthy plant may never produce a keiki. Seed propagation and commercial cloning require specialized conditions and are not practical household methods.

# Seasonal care

Indoor seasons are shaped by daylight, heating, cooling, and windows. Root activity, new leaves, and spike development remain the primary signals.

| OBSERVE | SPRING | SUMMER | AUTUMN | WINTER |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LIGHT | Increase filtered light gradually. | Shade hot direct sun. | Protect buds from sudden moves. | Use the brightest safe window. |
| WATER | New roots may use water faster. | Recheck bark and pot weight. | Intervals may widen. | Confirm near-dry bark first. |
| FEED | Begin weak feeding with growth. | Continue at a weak label rate. | Reduce as light declines. | Feed less in cool, dark rooms. |
| PROJECTS | Repot after flowering as needed. | Inspect roots, crown, and bark. | Watch for spike initiation. | Protect buds from cold glass. |

THE USEFUL SCHEDULE

## Schedule observations. Let the observations determine the care.

# Pet safety

The ASPCA lists *Phalaenopsis* orchids as non-toxic to dogs and cats.

## PRACTICAL PRECAUTIONS

Non-toxic does not mean edible. Place the plant where pets are unlikely to chew flowers, leaves, roots, or bark.

Collect fallen flowers, trimmed spikes, bark, clips, wire, and other potting debris promptly.

Prevent access to floral stakes and clips, which can cause injury if knocked over or swallowed.

Keep fertilizers, pesticides, and potting materials secured.

## WHAT TO DO

Chewing plant material can still cause stomach upset, and fertilizers or pesticides may be harmful. Contact a veterinarian if a pet develops symptoms or may have swallowed plant-care products.

### ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL

(888) 426-4435

A consultation fee may apply.

This guidance applies to correctly identified *Phalaenopsis* orchids. Keep the botanical name and any product labels available when seeking veterinary advice.

# Observation log: before a change

Use one page for one care decision. Print extra copies of pages 18-19 whenever you need them.

**PLANT NAME OR IDENTIFYING NOTE**

**DATE**

**LOCATION AND WINDOW DIRECTION**

**WHAT I OBSERVED**

**ROOTS AND BARK BEFORE WATERING**

☐ Roots green ☐ Roots silver ☐ Bark damp ☐ Bark nearly dry ☐ Not checked

**ONE ACTION I TOOK**

# Observation log: follow-up

Return after enough time has passed to notice a meaningful response. Avoid adding a second change too quickly.

**FOLLOW-UP DATE**

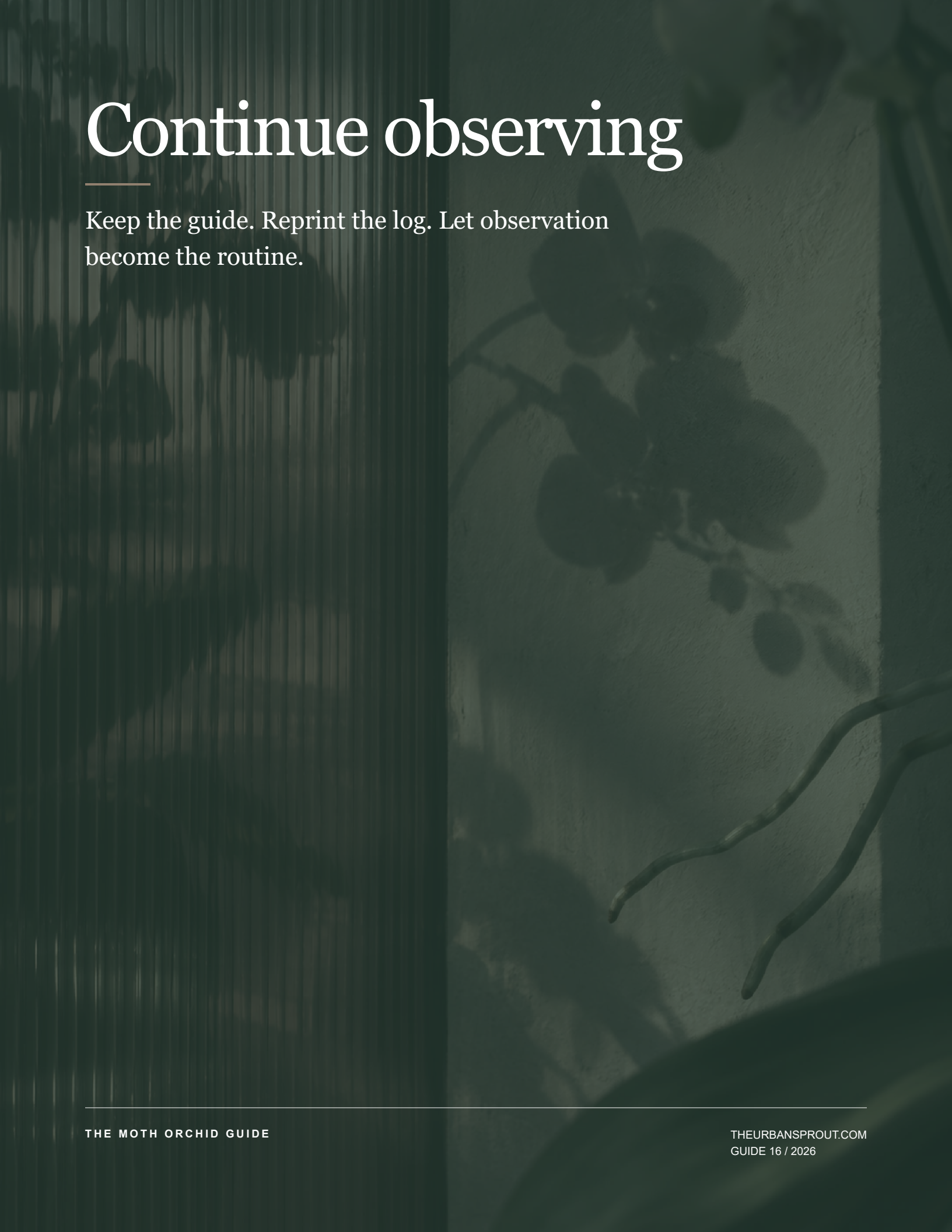
**DAYS SINCE THE CHANGE**

**WHAT CHANGED NEXT**

**WHAT STAYED THE SAME**

**MY NEXT OBSERVATION DATE AND WHY**

☐ Continue ☐ Reassess ☐ Seek expert help ☐ No further action

# Continue observing

Keep the guide. Reprint the log. Let observation become the routine.