

# How can you apply liquid fertiliser to your orchids?

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This may seem like a silly question, but there are some very good time saving and efficient ways to apply liquid fertiliser to your orchids. In the suggestions below I am assuming that all fertiliser will be mixed up at the concentration of 5g per 10 Litres (or 1 teaspoon per bucket) which is half strength. The basic methods come first. These are suitable for smaller collections.



1. **Bucket and cup.** (\$1) Mix up your fertiliser in a bucket (9L is a standard bucket) and pour on about 2 cups per plant. It's important that you wet all the mix in each pot until fertiliser pours out of the drainage holes. This works well for a small collection.
2. **Watering can.** Standard watering can, 9L, is quite heavy. Make sure you douche every plant thoroughly. In this method you will be wetting the foliage as well which is good (foliar feeding).
3. **5L pump sprayer.** (\$13 - \$70) You will be using your own manpower to pump the liquid fertiliser out of the fine spray head. You will need to hold the nozzle over each plant for some seconds until the fertiliser runs out of the drain holes. You can easily foliar fertilise at the same time. Because of the smaller amount dispensed to each plant, I suggest that you water your plants first, then spray them with fertiliser or wait till the next day. Some growers have seen good success with this method. You can also get a 13L pump sprayer on wheels (\$99) and a 15L backpack sprayer (\$70 - \$188)



PS While researching for this article I found that Holman has a 5L EzySpray Pump Free Garden Sprayer (\$59) which, after being connected to your hose, will spray your 5L of diluted fertiliser without the need for the hose or the need to pump it.



4. Battery operated electric sprayer, (5L shoulder; 25L trolley – \$90; \$375 Bunnings or Swagman) Rechargeable batteries, same using conditions as the pump packs, although there is a variety of heads that come with this sprayer and so it is easy to be more generous with the watering. I purchased a 16L Swagman a couple of years ago, but it is really too bulky for the narrow passageways in my orchid house 😞. I note that Bunnings now has a Silvan 25L Spotpak Redline Trolley Sprayer (\$376) which would meet my needs much better.



Water Pump and 200L blue drum. This is good for people who have large collections and who want to use their rainwater which, of course, is not attached to town water pressure. The drum is filled with water (can be rain water or tap water), fertiliser is added at the required rate and pumped out to their garden hose. It is easy to be generous with your liquid fertiliser using this system.



**NOTE:** All of the previous examples use liquid fertiliser at the required dilution rate. However, below you will see that you can use concentrated rates and mix it with hose water as it comes out of the hose. This means that you are not carting around large heavy containers of water and fertiliser.

6. Click-on 2L Seasol containers or the like. You can reuse a 2L empty click-on Seasol container if you know what concentration of fertilizer to put in the container. You will need to make it more concentrated than usual because the fertiliser will be diluted with hose water as it is sucked up and pushed out of the hose nozzle along with the tap water. I have found that it generally takes 40L of hose water to empty a 2L Seasol container or similar, regardless of the water pressure. This means that you will need to put 4 teaspoons of fertiliser in the 2L Seasol container. The disadvantage of this system is that the spray of diluted fertiliser comes out in a wide arc and it is impossible to aim it at one plant in particular. Also, to cut off or reduce the



flow you must kink the hose. You will be watering a lot of plants in one sweep, and you generally get a bit wet. It is a quick way to fertilise a lot of plants, though. I generally use it when I have limited time on a fertilising day.



7. Holman Quikmix Spray Gun (\$20) will click onto your hose and do the same job as the empty Seasol container with the advantage of having a proper hose rose with a trigger. It dilutes at different rates according to the dial (1 – 8) on the top. Level 2 will empty the 450ml concentrate container with 20L of hose water. This means that you will have to put 2 teaspoons of orchid fertiliser into the 450ml concentrate container (or only one teaspoon if you only half fill it to 225ml). This sounds so good to me that I think I'll have to buy one! Great for those small groups of plants that require a different type of fertilizer at times eg Seasol to encourage young or newly mounted plants to develop new roots.



8. Irrigation Venturi Fertilizer Injector or 'Fertigator' (\$20) This system works in exactly the same way as the Quickmix spray gun or the Seasol container except on a larger scale. The tube that 'sucks up' the concentrate from the bucket it is sitting in, is inserted in your hose line near the tap. When the hose is running, it sucks up the concentrate which is diluted with the hose water as it runs past the tube opening. You are then free to move about wherever you wish with your hose rose. I have seen this system working very successfully for a grower with a collection which has achieved many national awards.