

Meet Ka Lai Lou, the “Orchid Whisperer”!



There are many people at the NIH that have found unique ways to adopt green practices into their work lives. One such individual is Ms. Ka Lai Lou, an NCI employee within the Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics. She joined the NIH and NCI in 2011 and currently works as a Program Specialist for the Office of the Director. Visiting her office on the Shady Grove campus makes one thing very clear: she loves plants! Ka Lai is particularly well known for her many orchid plants, which led to her nickname as the “Orchid Whisperer.” Her love for this

plant species started with caring for a single struggling orchid for her mother six years ago. Orchids are notoriously difficult plants to raise, yet Ka Lai has managed to keep 17 orchid plants happy and healthy around her office! She even has a few tips for anyone seeking success with raising orchids. Her advice is to water the plants only once a week by soaking each plant’s roots for 15-20 minutes. She would also recommend placing the plants in a room with plenty of sunlight, but not direct sunlight. Also, avoid placing the plants too close to the window in the summer as they could get burnt.



As discussed in our other two articles for this issue, plants in the office setting have psychological benefits in addition to being visually appealing. In fact, Ka Lai believes her orchids around the office have helped her reduce stress levels and have made the office space more inviting. The same can be said for the other types of plants she raises, like aloe, anthurium, bromeliad and various succulents. These plants are easier to care for than orchids and would make a better starter plant for anyone inexperienced with office plants. Let’s follow Ka Lai’s example and each adopt an office plant!



Besides nurturing her plants, Ka Lai aims to reduce waste at home and in the office by practicing the five R’s: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rot. As an employee on the Shady Grove campus, she has explored many ways to improve sustainability within her office and her building. Some of these include using a cloth handkerchief to reduce paper towel use, using cloth bags in place of plastic bags, and avoiding personal waste bin use whenever possible to cut back on trash bags. We can each make a difference by committing to a small change and sticking with it!