



# 'VIOLET TALK'

September October 2015

5/2015

*The AFRICAN VIOLET SOCIETY of WA (Inc.)*

Affiliated with the Gesneriad Council of Australia and New Zealand

Founded August 1965

PO Box 197, Como 6952.



Celebrating our Golden Anniversary Year



Visit our website at [www.waavsync.com](http://www.waavsync.com) or Google *African Violet Society WA*



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## 2015/2016 President's October 2015 Report:

We have started the 2015/2016 year quietly with a small attendance at our September General Meeting. Many of our members were absent due to travelling here and there intrastate, interstate and overseas at this time of year particularly before the heat hits here in Western Australia. Thanks to all members who sent apologies. At the Monthly Meeting we had a great presentation from Bob Hunter who is the President of the Cacti and Succulent Society of WA and a very well-travelled man himself. A special moment at this Meeting was the presentation of flowers to two very hardworking committee members from the 2014/2015 African Violet Society of WA (Inc.) Committee; Sarah Pratt (President) and Judy Toop (Treasurer). Both are taking a short rest before hopefully re-joining the Committee in 2016/2017 and continuing their excellent work and support for the Society. Sincere thanks from all of the Society's members to both of you.



A few African violets and gesneriads were to hand, not bad considering. We had an excellent previous weekend at the WA Horticultural Garden Clubs and Societies Fair where we sold out on the first day. Our website is doing an average of 600 visitors per week, so the interest is out there and it has its peaks and troughs as it goes along. Love to have a proportionate number of them join us. The Facebook page is minimal and is doing well. The focus this year is improving growing performance; encouraging more of our members to grow; and grow African violets better. Our Annual May Show at Kardinya Park Shopping Centre is on the "Mother's Day" weekend; Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

Each Meeting leading to that Month has a subject presented by our more experienced growers. Reiko Lee (Going Potty) starts the sequence and Aileen LaRosa (Grooming) follows up in November. These two are legends in our Society; always stepping up to help with activities; standing up to help with shows and fairs; growing absolutely beautiful African violets and Gesneriads and winning many trophies and awards since they joined way back in the late 1980s. They are absolutely amazing and deservedly hold Honorary Life Membership with our Society. We also have a very special visit to RICHGRO scheduled on our normal Saturday Monthly Meeting in March 2016.

*Eric Bateman (President)*

### CURRENT CALENDAR OF EVENTS SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2015

*Subject to change*

- **Meeting October - 17<sup>th</sup>** The third Saturday in October; a Bonsai presentation (by Leo organised by Sarah Pratt); Presentation by Reiko (Discussion of pots and their uses); Show & Tell – Anne Cowie; Beginner's questions and answers. **Put your thinking "caps" on, we need a theme for our 2016 Annual May Show.**
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- **Meeting - November 16<sup>th</sup>** Green Room presentation (Peter Fry – organiser); Show and Tell – Gwen Curry; Final Competition Table for the year; beginner's questions and answers. Christmas Luncheon: Finger food list and volunteers please.



- **Christmas Luncheon - December 5<sup>th</sup>** – Manning Activity Centre 12 noon. Special guests, our Patron Geoff Richards from RICHGRO and Rob Grey from Garden City Plastics Australia. Volunteers will you please be at the centre by 11 AM. Our luncheon includes the Presentation of Competition and generic awards and Trophies. A special Christmas Raffle will be conducted for all those who attend.



## REJUVENATING AGEING AFRICAN VIOLETS

Our growers never have old African violets; they are always new and fresh and healthy. They know what to do and will help the general untrained public who sometimes can have African violets look sick and old. We can help to rejuvenate and continue their revered plants to be again be nice healthy looking African violets. Even multiple new plants! Firstly think about when you



last renewed your potting soil? What is your watering routine? This is where most of the general public might be erring. Overwatering is fatal to any pot plant. If top watering, only water when the surface is dry and then give



a thorough watering, until the soil surface is dry again. African violets that maybe in trouble usually don't use much water of course, there could be other reasons. A flourishing plant on a saucer may need water every day or so, particularly if it is in a small pot and the weather is warm. (*That is why our growers use wick watering.*) To keep your African violets that obviously need some attention, you need to get all a few tools ready for the task. This means having fresh suitable potting mix, and pots; possibly smaller than the one the African violet is growing in if it needs "surgery". A small soft brush, a scalpel like cutting tool, a label, if it has a name tape is also required. Another very handy tool for African violets is a long slender probe for getting into those awkward places to dislodge soil from roots, crowns or leaf suckers.

**Remove the African violet from its pot.** Do this by gently tapping the pot slightly on its side. If it does not free itself then use the probe, inserted into one of the drainage holes and levered upwards. This will easily loosen the plant from the pot. Then remove all the old yellowing leaves from the outside of the plant and at the same time try to keep your African violet nice and symmetrical even if it means taking off a few more leaves. Next gently ease off some of the soil around the roots. If most of the soil falls off easily it is probably because the African violet was overpotted and if there are very few roots you have probably been overwatering. Scrape the stem with your cutting tool as if you were scraping the skin from a carrot. Don't be nervous about this, as the idea is to scrape off the old petiole stubs and the brown skin on the main stem until you have nice healthy tissue.

The next step is to cut off the bottom 10% of the roots so that when you replace the plant in the pot, the petioles of the lower leaves will be just above the soil level and just below the rim of the pot. If there are very few roots left, remove enough leaves to balance, place centrally in a pot that is about a third to a half of the diameter of the plant. Clean the remaining leaves with a brush and label the plant if you know its name. See that the soil is moist but not too wet for the first week or so. With good care, your African violet should grow up to be young and rejuvenated. Scrawny twisted necks can be scraped and multiple plants separated, overgrown suckers removed and potted.

On the other hand, your old African violets may have been happily residing on your kitchen window sill. You have faithfully watered them because you don't know much about African violets and not really knowing much about it or what to do. A friend or relative may have moved on or interstate and left them in your care. Then after 15 years your relative or friend comes back to visit and after helps you to rejuvenate them:

### Rejuvenating old African violets



Reveals dense root balls



Break off leaf (many)

Rejuvenating old African violets



Separating overgrown suckers



Scraping a twisted neck



Separating outsiders that may have seeded into the pot



Rejuvenation

**Wow!** Suddenly you have more and are looking for space to put the pots with them in. In a few months, life springs eternal and blooms will appear as you are now armed with how better to grow and groom them.

Window Lighting – Different seasons dictate distance away from glass



Kitchen Window Facing East



Laundry Window facing East



Window facing North



Kitchen Window facing East

Next issue we will update on their progress.

## “Going Potty”

I really marvel at the array of pots that we use for this passion of ours. My wife uses heaps of different varieties for different tasks. Of course there are certain pots that are standard for showing and growing in. Shum bowls for Trailers and Episcias, the various standard sizes from 50 mm to 100 mm that the Society recommends. Mini pots and trays used for potting a leaf, plantlets before moving them on to their right size pots to suit their next stage of growth, certain sizes for miniatures, semi miniatures and standards. However, utilising a “non-standard” container can be forced upon you, if your stock of the normal pots may not be sufficient until the next meeting comes along. So necessity is the cause of flexibility and or innovative adaption. When potting on, potting up and setting leaves, adapting containers (*some from yummy sweets that were in them*), until a purchase at the next meeting can be made. My wife also listens to and learns from experienced contemporaries that we have had the good fortunate to meet both here and in the fellowship of the Eastern States of Australia. That is one marvellous common factor with African violet Societies. One of the important things that I manage to do is wash them up. That means emptying, scouring the salt off, taking the wicks out, removing the green gunk on water containers and then using a bleach and detergent with another wash up. Woe is me, when I look at my masculine hands let alone smell them (actually I do wear gloves), phew! To tell the truth my wife has done a much greater percentage of cleaning the pots.

TLC given to all of the cultivars we have comes naturally to my better half. It brings the reward of such variety and beauty. I have taken many photos of her cultivars, some of which you have seen in these pages mostly from the great hybridisers around Australia. Fortunately my wife is not “Going Potty” when trays are used as watering devices. They are great option for initially saving space and can combine potting different leaves until moving on to pots for the individual plantlets. Flexibility dictated by space and circumstance is the nature of being a good grower providing each plant with the benefit of a good clean environment. Some examples are below and certainly not unique:

### Types of Pots examples



Potted on 70 mm pots



Pots notice the blue ones



Some of the washing up



Punnets and Honey Pots



Isolated plants in various adapted pots/tray



Louvre Light variable Pots

Photos - Eric Bateman

There are quite a few options however; it is to the advantage of the newer members who hopefully will produce a few entries to our Annual May Show in 2016 to know of these methods that they can consider employing themselves. Hopefully this has given our growers plenty of potential possibility and could be enlightening and timely as their passion grows and they do not go “Potty” if wanting to adapt. Remember though, competition demands standard size pots and all of the various categories of Gesneriads and African violets that are grown will be entered using the pots required by the competition rules.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

You can acquire a few tools to help you achieve the necessities of tending to this wonderful passion of ours. No doubt the artisans of the African violet world have their own very particular tool for doing a job like prying off suckers. One such dear lady uses a dental tool for that particular task. I would say it is valued very highly

seeing that I was not even allowed to hold it! Geez Louise! No it demonstrated to me how valuable to the owner tools can be.

So here are a few rudimentary ones that you could consider to be required to assist in carrying out the tasks encountered a few times a year.

#### Tools of the Trade



Containing the Tools



Cutting Tools



Tool Kit Gloves and Wicks



For those who seek a closer look!



Tool Kit The all-important Naming and Date Kit



Another tool in the kit that you will need is the spray bottle. This is important for applying moisture to your soil when potting up and also foliar feeding not to mention when something like Powdery Mildew comes along. Growers with large collections use bucket size containers and siphons which are for those who are really gripped by the passion. There are various containers to make up your fertiliser mix; one litre and three litre plastic milk bottles (properly cleaned with bleach) to mix in Manutec or whatever fertiliser one may use. OH, and don't forget the face masks.

Photos - Eric Bateman

## Be Upholding and Symmetrical

### *Even plants need support*

We might not mind some unsymmetrical, uneven plants on our shelves at home, but they are not ideal for exhibiting. The best show plants have a symmetrical form, which is to say, a circular shape. Some African violets are more inclined to give us this shape than others, but most can benefit from the use of a leaf support to train the leaves to grow the way we want them. This is especially beneficial for growing in natural light.

The leaf support is anything like a straw or a small tooth pick or similar. They also have the leaves more or less level with the top of the pot, displayed flat and evenly, with the flowers atop in a mound in the centre.

*Gesneriads* like *Episcia* can be symmetrically shaped; here are a few examples of Standards, Semi-miniatures, a Trailer and an *Episcia* that were taken last year at the AVAA Show in Sydney, and what a beautiful bunch of our passion they represent. It just represents what one can aim for in the choice of plant for show and the symmetry that can be achieved. Certainly perfection is always one step away and keeps each grower keeps trying to achieve it.

Symmetrical Examples



Standard - Buffalo Hunt



Standard - Variegated Jazztime



Trailer Ciralda



Chimera Duo



Episcia Pat's Favourite



Semi Miniature Irish Flirt



A Standard - Candy Pink



Semi Miniature - Rob's Boogie Woogie

## Turning your violets

If you are growing your violets in a position where they receive light from one side (this applies to most situations), it is best to rotate your plants a quarter turn each day, otherwise the leaves grow towards the light and if not rotated regularly the main stem will bend in that direction, and once that occurs no amount of turning will straighten it again. This spoils the shape of the plant. It has been suggested that to turn the plant in an anti-clockwise direction will be more beneficial than clockwise. This may or may not be true, but you may like to experiment.

African violets need no rest period. Given good conditions they will flower continuously forever.

### Some examples of lighting



Fluorescent lighting



Natural light



Desk Lamp



Gro-Lux and Cool White Fluro used by growers in AVS WA

Photos by Eric Bateman

## STREPTOCARPUS!

*Adapted from an article by Sue Hodges in 'African Violet News', African Violet-Gesneriad Society of NSW, Vol. 27 No. 3*

Streptocarpus are found in the wild in Africa and Madagascar. Some only ever have a single leaf which can grow as long as 75cm, while others form a rosette plant and others are branching, shrubby plants. Some streps die after flowering and others are perennial. Streps are usually shallow rooted plants and may grow in crevices in rocks.

Strep flowers are tubular with flaring petals. They vary from white to pink and red through to purple, often with darker markings in the throat of the flower. Some recent cultivars have patches of yellow on the lower petals.

Streps can be propagated from seed or by leaf as you would an African violet. They need an open, well-drained potting mix and a fairly shallow pot. Perlite may be added to violet mix if it retains too much moisture which can cause root rot. Streptocarpus plants are better kept slightly dry rather than too wet.

As Streps have large leaves they require slightly more fertilizer than violets. Regular fertilizing or a slow-release fertilizer will produce good results. They also like slightly less acid soil than violets so you can add a small amount of extra dolomite lime or some crushed eggshells to the mix.

Streptocarpus do best in a slightly cool position with very bright light. Although they will bloom for most of the year, the greatest flush of bloom will be in late spring.



# Monthly Competition

Our monthly competition is very important; Reiko does a terrific job of organising the layout, judging, compilation and reporting of the results. The photos below are a sample submitted for September 2015's Competition Table.

Judged by R. Lee and A. LaRosa

## Open class

1	AV- Single Colour	1 <sup>st</sup> Repeat Performance	J Bateman
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Repeat Performance	R Lee
2	AV-Multi Colour	2 <sup>nd</sup> Emrose	R Lee
3	AV-Variegated	1 <sup>st</sup> Picasso	A LaRosa
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Picasso	J Bateman
4	AV-Miniature	1 <sup>st</sup> Gleeful Elf	R Lee
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Opt. Little Pearl	A Larosa
5	AV- Semi-Mini	1 <sup>st</sup> Rob's Whodunit	R Lee
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Ness' Satin Rose	R Lee
6	Trailing AV	1 <sup>st</sup> Duchess Trail	A. LaRosa
		2 <sup>nd</sup> Rob's Boolaroo	A. LaRosa
9	Gesneriad-Fibrous root	1 <sup>st</sup> Streps. RL#4	R Lee

## Intermediate class

18	AV-Single Colour	2nd Buckeye Daydreamer	A Cowie
20	AV-Trailing	2nd Jay's Ice Castle	A Cowie

## Novice Class

No Entries this month

## Point Tally February-September 2015

Open		Intermediate		Novice	
P. Humphreys	10	A. Cowie	30	G. Gibbons	3
A. LaRosa	67			G. Currie	32
R. Lee	65			P. Fry	9
J. Bateman	12			A. Wiltshire	3
				E. Laidlaw	4
				N. Gardiner	2
				D. Osler	4



Repeat Performance – M. Taylor



Gleeful Elf – H. Pittman



Jay's Icecastle – J & J White



Streptocarpus RL#4 – R. Lee

Photos by Eric Bateman

Executive			
<i>President</i>	Eric Bateman	<i>Vice President</i>	Peter Fry
<i>Secretary</i>	Jacqui Bateman	<i>Treasurer</i>	Diana Osler
Supporting Committee			
<i>Membership Secretary</i>	Aileen LaRosa	<i>Competition Table</i>	Reiko Lee
<i>Trade Table</i>	Ernie Laidlaw	<i>Mentor</i>	Pat Humphreys
<i>Librarian</i>	Alison Fox	<i>Caddy</i>	Don Bulloch
<i>Raffles and Attendance</i>	Margaret Green, Barbara Johnson	<i>Gesneriad Council</i>	Norma Dougall
<i>Website Administrator and Violet Talk Editor</i>	Eric Bateman	<i>Photographer</i>	Judy Toop

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