

The African Violet Society of WA, Inc

PO Box 197, COMO, 6952

Information Booklet for Web Visitors

On behalf of the committee and members of the African Violet Society of WA (Inc.), may I extend a warm welcome to you and thank you for visiting our web page. We hope that you consider membership with us and it will provide experiences that are pleasurable and informative.

This Welcome Package is presented to assist in your assimilation, and to stimulate your interest in the growing and propagation of one of nature's most beautiful plants.

The information within is presented to offer you the basics of the operations of the Society, and to assist with the care of your plants.

Meetings are held on the third (3rd) Saturday of each month, excepting December, at the Manning Senior Citizens Centre, 3 Downey Drive Manning commencing at 1:15pm. You can visit as a guest twice before joining. The specific aim of meetings is for the dissemination of relevant information to members, presented in a relaxed and congenial atmosphere. Meetings also provide a forum for social interaction and usually include a workshop, demonstration or an invited Guest Speaker. Members are encouraged to suggest topics or Guest Speakers, or possible destinations for an occasional outing.

A **Competition Table** is conducted at every meeting. All members are encouraged to enter, not simply for the competition aspect, but more so for the knowledge that may be gained by such involvement. Competition provides an ideal opportunity to further knowledge on improving plant quality or overcoming difficulties.

A **Trading Table** is conducted prior to each meeting, from 1:15 pm to 1:45 pm. Members are provided with the opportunity to purchase or sell plants or supplies.

A **Library** also operates at every meeting, and although small, it contains a wealth of information. You are encouraged to read these publications to reap the benefits of the material in the Library to assist in their endeavours to produce outstanding plants.

A section on the history of African Violets commences this booklet.

May I Wish You "Happy Growing"!

I hope that you consider a membership which will grow and blossom as brightly and as prolifically as your African violets and you tell of your experiences to others.

The President

AN INTRODUCTION TO GESNERIADS

**It is mostly for the flowers that we grow them,
and it is mostly by the flowers that we know them.**

Gesneriads are members of a large group of flowering plants whose petals are fused into a tube. Closest relatives are other families within the group known as Lamiales, most of which have zygomorphic flowers. Gesneriaceae is now thought to be one of the oldest families in this group. Other families in this group include the snapdragon and foxglove family, and the mint family which includes the salvias.

Gesneriads are similar to the mint and snapdragon families, being *zygomorphic*, that is, they have flowers with mirror-image symmetry, the right side of the flower being a mirror image of the left.

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

With approximately 3,300 known species worldwide found on all continents except Antarctica, gesneriads are tropical to sub-tropical herbs, lianas, shrubs and rarely small trees. They can be terrestrial (growing in the ground), epiphytic (growing in trees) or lithophytic (growing on rocks). Their leaves are often hairy and usually opposite, but in some species are alternate or arranged spirally in a tight rosette. The flowers are usually zygomorphic and are found in an enormous range of colours and patterns, and are almost always showy. The seeds are extremely tiny and numerous.

TYPES OF GESNERIADS

Botanists refer to “Old World” gesneriads, native to Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania, and to “New World” gesneriads, those native to the Americas. Horticulturists usually refer to gesneriads by the various habits of growth found in this family, and have divided them into three types for ease of description –

- **Tuberous** – Those with a large tuberous root which is the base of the stem. Most would recognise this from the *Sinningia speciosa*, the Florest Gloxinia.
- **Rhizomatous** – Those with rhizomes which grow underground at the base of the stem, or occasionally in the leaf axils on some species. The best known scaly rhizome is the Achimenes.
- **Fibrous** – Those lacking either tubers or rhizomes, and with no underground storage structure. They may be terrestrial, epiphytic or lithophytic. They may be annual or herbaceous or woody perennials. Most familiar is the African violet (*Saintpaulia*), usually grown from leaf cuttings

GESNERIAD CARE

Gesneriads are like people, with the same basic requirements.

- **Recommended Considerations** – All aspects of light, temperature, humidity, water, the container, nutrients, and the growing medium.
- **Novice Growers** – Always start with only a few plants, and learn how to grow and care for them well before expanding your collection too large.
- **Easy Starter Plants** – Include – *Aeschynanthus* ‘Black Pagoda’ ; *Alsobia* ‘Cygnet’ ; *Columnneas* , various ; *Chirita sinensis* ; *Chrysothemis pulchella* ; *Episcias*, various ; *Nautilocalyx forgetii* ; *Nematanthus* ‘Tropicana’ ; *Saintpaulias* cultivars ; and *Sinningia pusilla*.
- **Microclimates** – Discover the microclimates in your living areas. Try growing gesneriads in different conditions – windowsill exposures, under fluorescent lights, outdoors if it is warm enough and the position offers adequate protection.

INCREASING BLOOM IN AFRICAN VIOLETS

African violets are not seasonal bloomers as are most houseplants. If conditions are favorable, they may be ever-blooming, as do some varieties.

Ideal conditions include an ideal temperature range, suitable potting mix, adequate water supply, correct potting and re-potting methodology, and provision of good light.

Sometimes we want to increase bloom for a special occasion such as an annual show. The use of fertilisers called bloom boosters is recommended for a limited period between 10 to 7 weeks prior to the required date. It is useful to have a full understanding of this type of plant food, as there may be some problems in their use. Bloom boosters have a lower nitrogen, higher phosphorous and potassium number in the NPK ratio. Used for too long a period or too concentrated may result in hard brittle foliage and burnt centres. While higher strength phosphorous and potassium is meant to increase bloom and produce many quality flowers, it must be combined with light conditions, which may be difficult in natural light, particularly with the shorter days in winter. A 'Preparing for a Show's schedule is available from the Mentor.

It is tempting to give higher fertiliser concentrations but this can cause a real disaster. A rule of thumb for all fertilisers, which are not necessarily made specifically for African violets, is to use only a scant quarter of a teaspoon per five litres of water and this concentration may be reduced in periods of slow growth or stress.

A bloom booster such as *Manutec* may be used **occasionally** in normal growing conditions for **short periods**. *Manutec* does not contain urea in its nitrogen composition, which is a real advantage. Young plants need the highest nitrogen for good foliage. When new to using bloom boosters, it is suggested that they be used with every caution, and only on a very limited number of plants.

The common fertilizer used by members is *Manutec*. In the eastern states, many beautiful plants are seen which have been grown exclusively on *Kenrose*, an all-round violet food for both young and mature plants. However, *Kenrose* is difficult to obtain in WA. Whatever you choose will be a learning experience.

Potting Medium.

The use of the Society-prepared potting medium prepared by the Society is strongly recommended as this has over time proved to be the most effective medium available. While some commercial mediums are of value, growers must be constantly aware that the medium must be light – commercial mediums are usually too heavy for African violets, however, both they and the Society's medium, may be lightened somewhat with the addition of poly balls. The most critical requirement of an African violet potting medium is the *pH*, which must be between 6.5 and 6.8.

Experimentation.

The Society encourages and supports experimentation by members, the results of which, when confirmed, are hopefully always shared with other members.

Some current experimentation includes –

- Effectiveness of different fertilizers, bloom boosters and a propagation inoculant.
- Use of coco peat in potting medium.
- Propagation using scraped necks, from floating leaves, and from floating flowers.
- Vertical growing of African violets.
- Hybridising.

THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS!

Anyone can successfully grow African violets by providing the basics.

ADEQUATE LIGHT. Essential for bloom! The more light, the more bloom.

- Any window that has strong, bright light is satisfactory.
- Avoid windows covered by porches or heavily shaded by trees.
- Mild sunshine is beneficial, but shield from summer sun during hot midday hours.
- Inadequate natural light? Use fluorescent lamps for about 10-12 hours a day.
- Distance from a light source? Small or young = 20-30cms; Mature = 30-40cms.
- Distance for Gro-Lux tubes may be slightly further than for Cool White.
- If plants grow upright with long leaf stems, decrease the distance to the light.
- If they grow very compact, tending to be hard and brittle, increase the distance.
- At the correct distance they will grow as flat, uniform rosettes with many blooms.
- Allow a minimum dark period of at least 8 hours.
- Every 2nd day give ¼ turn to ensure even growth for window/ edge of light plants.

HUMIDITY. Some homes have it, some don't!

- The ideal is a constant level of 40 to 50%.
- Humidity difficult to maintain? Try growing many close together, or place them on a 'spacer' in a flat pan containing water – not in contact with water.
- Poly film on a frame or a plastic bag enclosing a plant will maintain high humidity.
- If exposed to the sun, open the cover to reduce the internal temperature.

TEMPERATURE. A consistent recommended temperature range is critical.

- The ideal temperatures are – Daytime between 20 to 27°C. Nighttime between 18 and 21°C.
- Temperature too low? Lower than 15 C for an extended period will slow growth.
- Temperature too high? Sappy, spindly plant with few flowers that usually drop before gaining size. Better if slightly cool than too hot, especially if low humidity.

FRESH CIRCULATING AIR. Ensure plants receive good supply of fresh air.

- Avoid cold draughts onto plants – they despise a dead, dark atmosphere.
- Principle food of plants is carbon dioxide from air and hydrogen from water.
- Dead air is an invitation to mildew. Fresh air is invigorating to violets and to you.

WATERING. The most important single factor.

- Use any water suitable for drinking. Rainwater is ideal!
- Allow chlorinated water to stand for some hours before use.
- Never use water that has been through a water softener.
- Water with a heavy mineral content can accumulate excess salts in the soil.

HOW and WHEN to WATER. From the top, from the bottom, or by wick.

- Top watering – When the soil is dry to the touch, then water thoroughly.
- Wick Watering – Replenish reservoir when necessary with weak fertiliser solution.
- Bottom Watering – Never allow plants to stand in water.
- Periodic watering from the top is necessary to flush out accumulated salts.
- A gentle wash of all foliage of all plants is helpful and keeps plants clean.
- Do not expose to direct sun or draughts while foliage is wet.
- Water should be at or slightly above room temperature – they dislike cold feet.
- Plants do not like scheduled watering; check daily to determine when required.
- Water demand is related to temperature, humidity, soil type, plant size and vigour.
- Plants absorb air as well as water through their roots, so do not drown them.
- Extended dryness will cause loss of tiny feeding roots.

PROPAGATING FROM A LEAF

Shy and Demure! The Symbol of Modesty!

The African violet is often regarded with much trepidation by first time growers. However, there's no reason to be a shrinking violet when it comes to propagating!

A basic and satisfying lesson for a beginner is to successfully propagate from a leaf. It is so simple, and almost a pity to waste a leaf accidentally broken from a plant.

REQUIREMENTS. Pot – 50 to 60mm Potting medium – See below
Wick – 12cm of thin acrylic yarn Reservoir – Plastic T/A container

POTTING MEDIUM. A suitable African violet medium in which to strike the leaf is essential. The Society sells an ideal medium, specifically prepared to suit the species. A suitable medium is essentially a mix of 1/3 commercial medium, 1/3 vermiculite and 1/3 perlite. A pH of 6.5 to 6.8 is ideal. If planted in heavier soils or soils that remain too damp, leaves will rot. Commercial mediums are usually too heavy for propagation.

THE LEAF. Choose a leaf from about the third row from the plant centre and break it off cleanly at the end of the petiole (leaf stalk). It is preferable not to use outside leaves of a mature plant or very young, small leaves from the centre - they may root well but not produce plantlets, or the small leaves may rot.

LEAF PREPARATION. Reduce the petiole to about 3-4cm, cutting at about a 40-degree angle from the top, using a razor blade or scalpel – the angled cut increases root or plantlet formation. When planting, face the angled cut slightly upwards, thus assisting the plantlets to appear in the open part of the pot and not under the parent leaf.

PLANTING. Record the species name on white tape and affix to the outside of the pot. Insert wick through one of the holes in the base, hold it at the rim and fill pot with mix. Make a small hole using a dibbler (or pencil) and plant the leaf about 1-2cm deep. Ideally, support the leaf with a plastic nametag or pop-stick. Water gently from the top and allow to stand 3-4 hours to drain-off excess water. The pot can now be placed on a reservoir with the wick submerged in water.

Now, Sit back and enjoy the satisfaction of propagating one of nature's gems.



Name & Wick



Potting Mix



Cut Petiole



Plant Leaf



Pot & 3 leaves

EVENTS AT MEETINGS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Conducted on the 3rd Saturday of August each year, at the Manning Senior Citizens Centre, Downey Rd Manning commencing at 2:00pm. The main purpose of the AGM is to elect the committee for the forthcoming year. Every person possesses unique skills and strengths, all of which offer considerable potential for the future progress of the Society. Members are encouraged to consider taking an active role in the Society, which may include being on committee or in a Position of Responsibility, e.g., Trading Table supervision.

GENERAL MEETINGS

Conducted as per page 1 of this booklet. Further to the information and decision-making aspects of the meeting, members are offered the following specific services and opportunities.

COMPETITION TABLE

Conducted at every General Meeting providing members an opportunity to display their plants. By displaying plants a member opens an avenue of furthering their personal knowledge and expertise in "Growing & Showing".

- **Participants** – Every member is encouraged to enter plants on the Table.
- **Levels of Competition** – Three levels, NOVICE, INTERMEDIATE, OPEN.
 - Novice** – Until you win 3 x Novice First Places in a calendar year.
 - Intermediate** – Until you win 3 x Intermediate First Places in a calendar year.
 - Open** – Growers who have been promoted from the Intermediate Level.
- **Entering** – Growers may enter plants on a regular or casual basis.
 - Entry Slip** – A Grower's MID# (Member ID No.) is to be entered placed by entry.
 - Limit** – Limit of 2 plants per class. Plants must be healthy and in clean pots.
 - Points** – 1st Place = 3 points; 2nd Place = 2 points; every Novice Entry = 1 point.

TRADING TABLE

Operates at every General Meeting, providing members with an opportunity to buy or sell plants or supplies – open only from 30 minutes immediately preceding the meeting, i.e., 1:30pm to 2:00 pm. The following points should be noted –

Pricing – Prices are set significantly lower than normal retail prices.

Member Prices – Prices shown are Member Prices.

Non-Member Prices – Attract an extra levy added to the Member price.

Member Sales – Member sales through the Table attract a 10% donation.

LIBRARY

Operates at all General Meetings. Members are encouraged to avail themselves of the benefits of Library materials to assist in their knowledge base, knowledge that may be shared with their peers. We all learn through sharing our information and knowledge.

AFTERNOON TEA

A period of social interaction between members, a time when much information and assistance is often exchanged, and a time when many important ideas and decisions are discussed and decided. Afternoon Tea fare is provided by willing members, and all are asked to support the contributions of a plate when possible. Members are enlisted to assist with organising and clearing-up with this service, and a volunteer roster is prepared annually. Member voluntary assistance is requested and welcomed.

AGAIN THANK YOU FOR VISITING WEB SITE AND HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON