

November 2013

The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

A free download from www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net

This is the second edition of this newsletter. Thank you to all those who have shown support and appreciation of the first edition. I hope this one will not disappoint. I have been learning as I prepared it, and my enthusiasm for African violet chimeras has been rekindled by looking up lots of photographs before preparing the article in later pages.

And that's what I hope this newsletter will do - help with a little learning, a little sharing and lots of enthusiasm and pleasure in our favourite plants.

You are invited to download this and to enjoy it in any way you wish. Should you want to comment, ask a question or contribute, please email me at coulson.ruth@yahoo.com.au.

Jenny's Delight



This plant - a brand new chimera African violet - was seen recently as Best Standard African Violet at the Annual Show of the African Violet Association of Australia. It is a sport of 'Arctic Frost' and shares same large, almost double, flowers as that Sorano hybrid. This plant was exhibited by Jenny White, but the mutation occurred in the collection of a grower in Brisbane.

Sometimes we deprecate the tendency of African violets to mutate. But surely not if the mutations are plants like this!

African Violet Shows Around Australia

There have been a number of African violet shows during the last two months. I am reliably told that all were beautiful. Hardly a surprise! Here are some reports and a few photographs. My grateful thanks to the people who supplied them.

African Violet Society of Queensland - 19 & 20 October:

Best in Show/Best Standard	'Jays' Just Pink'	Kirsty Volling
Best Miniature	'Pungtohen'	Wendy Emeny
Best Trailer	'Tattle Trail'	Maree Zimmerman
Best Gesneriad	Sinningia speciosa 'Brocade'	Dave Jarvis
Best plant in Novice	'Wee Willie'	Sue Bell
Best plant in Intermediate	'Tattle	Maree Zimmeman

This year was the first time for a while that we have been able to award a trophy for Novice Class, which is encouraging.

It was interesting to note, also, that both Wendy (Best Miniature) and Maree (Best Trailer) are Intermediate growers. This augurs well for the future. Sadly, some of our more experienced growers are unable to compete, either because of health or family commitments, so it really good to see a new young team coming to the fore.

This was the first time I have stewarded the show for a few years, so it was a good time to make some changes. We changed the hall layout, bought new mauve skirts for the show benches, and took the hanging baskets off a frame and mounted them on the regular benches. Whew!

From Helen Irwin

The photographs show - from the top: 'Jays' Just Pink', 'Tattle Trail' and 'Tineke'



The African Violet Society of South Australia - 26 & 27 October

Show Champion	Star City	Keith Gregory
Reserve Champion	Hawaiian Pearl	Anne Gregory
Best miniature/semiminiature	Heinz's Little Nugget	Keith Gregory
Best Trailer	Happy Trails	Anne Gregory
Best Species	Saintpaulia tongwensis	Joy King
Best Australian hybrid	Colonial Mt. Remarkable	
		Anne Gregory
Best Other Gesneriad	Episcia 'Frosty'	Suzanne Conniff

The Adelaide Show is a good show to visit it is not as large as some of the other shows around the country but they certainly give interstate visitors a very warm welcome. The Artistic part of the show I found very interesting as we at Early Morn are just starting to reintroduce this into our show. While we were there it was good to catch up with many of members we know how attended our show over the years. We also formed some new friendships with people who we only had previously known through email contact. So if you are able to take the opportunity to visit an interstate show my advise it do it! Thank once again to the members of South Australia for making our visit so enjoyable.

From Pam & Keith Kennedy



Photographs: From top: Star City, Hawaiian Pearl, Heinz's Little Nugget.



African Violet Association of Australia - 2nd & 3rd November

Grand Champion African Violet	'Rob's Boolaroo'	Dennis Halton
Best Standard African Violet	'Jenny's Delight'	J&J White
Best Trailing African Violet (other than Champion)		

	'Cirelda'	Dennis Halton
Best Miniature African Violet	'Ness' Crinkle Blue'	R&S Armstrong
Best Other Gesneriad	Sinningia 'Thalia'	Ruth Coulson
AVAA Championship	Collection	R&S Armstrong



Following the unseasonable hot spell that occurred in the weeks preceding the show and the number of growers who declared they wouldn't have "anything", an amazing number of beautiful plants, both African violets and other gesneriad, came along to the show.

The sale tables appeared to be swell stocked and the visiting public were supportive, especially on the Saturday afternoon when real enthusiasts appear to "get in early".



Of course we always hope that there will be more plants and more visitors next year, but I would have to say that a show is always enjoyable and there is always much to see and much to learn.

From Ruth Coulson

Photographs: from top: 'Rob's Boolaroo', 'Cirelda', 'Ness' Crinkle Blue' (unfortunately the photographs don't show either of the two amazing trailers to the best advantage)

Leaching

This is a part of the care of African violets that is often more talked of than carried out. I know. I used to be rather careless about whether I leached my plants or not. But now I am more focused and do it regularly.

Why do we leach our plants? When you wick water your African violets all the movement of the water/fertiliser solution is upwards in the pot. It is supplied from the bottom and evaporates from the plant and the surface of the mix. This is the opposite of the way plants mostly receive their water in nature. The result is that excess fertiliser accumulates in the potting mix and in particular on the surface.

What is leaching? It is just simply pouring mildly warm fresh water through the root system of the plant until it runs freely through the drain holes of the pot.

So, what's so good about leaching your African violets? It gives you a chance to really clean out the potting mix of any accumulated fertiliser salts, water impurities or any other undesirable content. The plant gets a fresh start. It is particularly useful if you have not repotted for some time as there could well be lots of impurities in the mix, or if the water supply is very alkaline. Of course it might seem odd to add more of the alkaline water to deal with the problems of an alkaline water supply. It is helpful, though, as it eliminates much of the alkaline build up after weeks of wick watering and can promote much healthier plants.

So that's why I now leach my plants as often as I can manage. And I am know that they do show the benefits by improved health and even growth.

Chimera African Violets Are Different

Well, they would be, wouldn't they – the dictionary says that a chimera is “a wild impossible scheme or an unreal conception”. In the case of African violets the reason they are different lies in the way the tissues are held in the plant itself. This makes them more of a challenge to propagate and perhaps, even more beautiful to look at. These plants produce flowers that are some of the most spectacular of all African violets.



Much has been already written about the reason chimeras happen in African violets and I have no intention of rewriting that here. I have recently done some internet research though. At the end of this article I list the websites that I found most interesting and informative, and also those that I loved for their beautiful photographs.

What I am most interested in is the gorgeous looks of some of these flowers. Conventionally a chimera African violet occurs as a sport. You suspect the plant has mutated when the flower looks like a pinwheel with a stripe along each petal that contrasts with the base colour of the flower. You know it is a chimera when you try to propagate it by leaf and only get plants with solid colour bloom. That's the bit where chimeras are more of a challenge to reproduce.

Without going into how to propagate a chimera African violet which is dealt with in many other places, let's check their history and how they really look. We have been told that the first chimera was 'Granger's Valencia'. Of course it wasn't the first that ever occurred. Just the first registered. African violets did not suddenly decide to sport in this way only at that point. In fact the earlier chimeras were registered as 'edged'. In 1969 Dr. Crawcour, an early enthusiastic grower in Australia who was instrumental in creating a number of societies, registered 'Southern Cross' as "Single pink star/lavender edge. Ovate, supreme, scalloped." Here is a photograph of the plant. A chimera I think you would agree? Of course there were others too all over the world wherever African violets were grown.



Photos: Top - 'Kiwi Dazzler', probably my all time favourite chimera. Left: 'Southern Cross'

I suspect that at that time little was done with the plants because of the difficulty of propagation. Now that we seem to have that under control we have a huge number being selected, grown out and named.

Currently “First Class”, the computerised listing of hybrids from the American African Violet Society, comes up with a list of 25 plants if you search for chimera flowers. There are many others, though. In searching the internet for chimera African violets I had no trouble in putting together a series of over sixty photographs. If you want to whet your appetite for beautiful African violets, have a look at them here: <http://www.pinterest.com/coulsonruth/african-violets-for-everyones-chimera-african-viol/>. Guaranteed gorgeous.

You probably wouldn't be attracted by all that are chimeras. The thing is, some African violets that are probably chimeras don't have clear pinwheel patterning that is the real hallmark of a chimera. Some even have differences from one flower to another and, perhaps radical differences from one stem to another. One I grew in the early 1980s seemed to have the colours in patches rather than stripes, but of course that might have been a peculiarity of my plant. Some may like that. I don't. I really prefer those like 'Humako Tineke' and 'The Alps' that have clearly defined colours with sharp contrasts between them.

Now we are seeing more chimeras with much more exotic flowers and in colours that years ago we could only dream about. Chimeras combined with fantasies, with edges of different colours, chimeras featuring green, and I have recently seen a hint of a yellow that may be a chimera. 'Victorian Flirt' seems to always come top of any list of favourite African violet flowers. When you look at that flower you can really understand why.

And let's not forget that there are foliage chimeras

Photos (from top) 'Humako Tineke', 'Emerald City', 'Victorian Flirt', 'Meditation'. 'Darling Pixie Sport', 'The Alps'.





too. Harmony's Little Stinker is the only one I have ever seen. I didn't find it appealing and have never grown it so I can't talk about it, or any other foliage chimeras with any authority. A "First Class" search gives two entries for Foliage Chimeras – 'Rob's Lucky Number' and 'Rusty Tin Silk'. I don't believe that either of these is available in this country but I must say that 'Rob's Lucky Number' does look rather interesting as it is both a leaf chimera and a flower chimera. 'Rob's Lucky Charm' appears also to be a leaf chimera.

With this article is a little gallery of photos of some of the chimera African violets that I have grown over the last ten years or so. Some I don't have any more and I am now really regretting that.

Whatever way you look at it, chimeras just have that 'wow' factor that attracts all of us who are addicted to violets.

References further information (in no particular order):

- Nancy Robitaille – Chimeras <http://violetvoice.yuku.com/topic/1279>. It has a link to a photo gallery.
- <http://patandbloomviolets.web.fc2.com/chimera.html> This site has lots of photographs.
- Chimera African Violets: The Chimera African Violet Blog
- <http://chimeraav.com/> - Information and many photographs
- Micropropagation of Chimeral African Violets – Lineberger & Drukenbrod – Ohio State University
- <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/tisscult/chimeras/valprop/val.html>
- This is a really useful article even if the colours in the photographs are not absolutely accurate.
- The Violet Barn has an article about propagation "cutting out the crown of the plant". http://www.violetbarn.com/lessons/chimera_violets.htm

If you still want more - Google for African violet chimeras. For photographs click on "images". And don't forget to check my Pinterest board at the link given on the previous page.

*I hope you enjoy this e-newsletter you are welcome to distribute it to others if you wish. Articles reused must be acknowledged to source. There will be another in mid-January 2014. If you would like email notification of when that will be ready for download, please email me at coulson.ruth@yahoo.com.au. Otherwise just keep checking back to the website: www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net. Remember, too, all this information **and more** is available in the book - available from the website.*