



January 2014

# The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

A free download from [www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net](http://www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net)

This issue includes information on watering of African violets (always a vexing matter, and appreciation of the lesser considered beauties of African violet leaves. And more.

Those of you who have looked at this e-newsletter before will understand that the content is personal in tone. It reflects my likes and dislikes in African violets and my approach to growing them. Still I welcome all comments you might wish to make.

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](mailto:coulson.ruth@yahoo.com.au).



*Hybridised by I. Fredette and registered in 1986. It is described as a standard, single pink/coral centre, violet fantasy. Plain foliage*

## Chiffon Print

I was given a plant of Chiffon Print when it was quite a new cultivar. I loved it then; I love it still! It can be variable as to the amount of fantasy on the flowers, but it is always worthwhile and when it looks like this, it is absolutely stunning.

The oldies can still be the good ones.

One thing I have noticed with it, though - Although leaf propagation gave me good results initially, now I have to propagate from side-shoots to continue the exciting fantasy flowers.

## *The Unexpected Beauty of African Violet Leaves*

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If we think about the leaves of our African violets I suppose that we really just want them to be a suitable background for lots of beautiful flowers, as shown in the photograph above. When I first grew African violets I thought of them as variegated or plain, ruffled or not, dark or light and so on. But there is so much more to it.

Yes, I know that for a show plant we want great symmetry in the way the leaves lie and we like them to be beautifully flat so the whole effect is like a Victorian flower posy – flowers in the centre with a circlet of even leaves behind. But really the leaves do repay a closer look. Think of the different types of variegation just for a start. All have hairs, but some are

much more hairy than others. Some are ruffled, perhaps in an exaggerated way; some are quite simply a different colour.



**This plant shows the circular leaf pattern we look for in a good show African violet or even for the sheer joy of looking at it!**

I remembered a photograph I took some years ago that had awoken me to the beauty of the leaves themselves. I needed to restart some of my plants. They had been in their pots so long that they had longish “necks” and were better to be cut off and the tops planted as cuttings. After cutting them off I washed them and put them upside down on a tray to drain a

little before I replanted them. The effect was so interesting that I took a photo. Here is the picture.



This was some years ago so I don't remember what the plants were, but I know I didn't think there was anything remarkably different about their leaves. Pretty obviously the one at top left would have been quite a bit darker than the one at bottom right. That's what the red under the leaves does. It makes the green leaf look darker and in some cases almost black. What I wasn't prepared for, I suppose was the different colour shadings, the differences in the veining and the overall different look. Every one is individual. While an African violet without flowers can often not be identified from the top of the leaves, it is probably different from below. They all seem to have their own character.



I was interested to see that in most cases variegation doesn't make much difference to the bottom of the leaf as shown in the photograph here.

Do try looking at the underneath of the leaves of your violets.

And then you might also like to look more carefully at the hairs on the leaves. I am afraid this picture has lost some of its definition in being reduced in size for this publication. So get your magnifying glass out and look at the leaves of some of your own African violets. It's quite delightful the way the hairs glisten along the edges of the leaves if the light is really good. The stems are unexpectedly hairy too.

Then there is variegation, ruffling, etc. . . . Next time!



## **Just One Thing More About Chimeras**



Not all African violets with flowers that look like a pinwheel are chimeras.

I get momentarily confused every time I grow a plant of I Feel Pretty. What's that pink and white chimera I think. I pick it up to read its label only to find it isn't a chimera at all, it's this gorgeous Kent Stork hybrid from 1997. Its description is

"Single-semidouble white pansy/pink eye, variable pink edge. Light-medium green, quilted".

For me it's a great plant. It grows as a medium sized standard, and the first flowers start to appear when the plant is very young. They keep on coming and the individual blooms last well. And it looks so good at the same time. What more could we ask for.

## **A Question About Watering African Violets**

*I have quite a few African violets now. Watering was easy when there were just one or two as I kept them on the kitchen windowsill where it was easy to add a little warm water every time they seemed to be getting dry. I have received a lot more from friends over recent months, and I love them all but the watering is starting to be a problem for me as I am a busy person. What is the best method to use? I am worried because I have been told that if I over-water them they will die.*

Watering can be the greatest quandary that is faced by the African violet grower. It is right to be cautious.

My ideas on watering have evolved over the longish time I have been growing African violets. Evolved for greater success I hope and to make the whole thing easier for me.

One thing I still believe is that it doesn't matter **how** you water, just so long as you do. But remember that too-much can be just too-bad. In fact I now understand that the way the plants are watered should be in

harmony with the potting mix used.

The larger the granules in the potting mix the more air it will hold; the smaller the granules the more moisture it will hold. This is complicated a bit by the fact that some products used in potting mixes, like peat moss and vermiculite do of themselves hold moisture, but in general it is true. For me, the coarser grained potting mixes allow wick watering without the worry of the roots

becoming too wet. So depending on the ability of your plants to take up water and for the pot to drain properly, wick-watering might work for you also. It is really easy to do and it's simpler for the grower as well as ensuring an even supply of water for the plant.



So how to do it: The idea is that with a coarse yet moisture retentive potting mix you have a wick made of some synthetic material such as nylon or acrylic which makes good contact with the potting mix inside the pot and emerging through a drain hole in the bottom of the pot then hangs into a

supply of water. So long as the potting mix and the wick are moist to start with water should be taken up as the plant needs it until the supply is all used up. Leave it a day or so and refill the water.

Just how you arrange this is up to you. A classic method is using a take-away food container as the reservoir, with the plant sitting on the lid, with the wick dangling through a hole in the lid. Dilute (one third to one half strength) liquid African violet fertiliser can be added to the water. That way the plant gets constant feeding and watering together.

These two photographs probably explain better than words just what I mean. They appear in a larger size on my website at <http://www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net/african-violet-care.html>. They also appear in the book, African Violets for Everyone available from the website.

If you find that they don't look quite as nice as you would like, then you can enclose the whole thing (reservoir and pot) in an overpot or basket. Or, there are any number of specialist watering pots on the market. Just do try one or two before going any further to make sure that your plants are going to like the system, and that the pots are going to draw water just how you need them to do.

## **Heat and African Violets**

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It is full summer in Australia now and much of the country is in the grip of a heat wave. A heat wave that is setting records everywhere, and shows no sign of ending quickly. We are to look to expect more of the same, in fact more extremes all over the world. So what can we do to ameliorate the effects of the heat on our African violets?

1. High temperatures aren't such a problem for African violets if the humidity is also high.
2. Where humidity is low as it very often is in these cases, be careful that the plants don't dry out.
3. Resist the temptation to over-water as this will likely make the plant's condition worse.
4. Where possible, reduce heat by turning off artificial lighting for at least some of the time.
5. If growing by natural light draw blinds or curtains, move plants away from windows during the day for the duration of the heat wave.
6. Run artificial lighting during the night. Be sure to allow a period for the temperature to cool down a little before lights come on. I run my lights from around midnight or 1.00am. If the temperature is tending to soar by 8.00 or 9.00am I turn off lights.
7. When plants are enervated by great heat, and especially low humidity the leaves will become soft and droop even though the plant is well watered. If possible use a leaf support so that when the leaves firm up again in cooler temperatures the plant will still be attractive.
8. Remove all the dead and dying flowers that will occur at this time to avoid any fungal problem.

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*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-March 2014. If you would like email notification of when that will be ready for download, please email me at [coulson.ruth@yahoo.com.au](mailto:coulson.ruth@yahoo.com.au). Otherwise just keep checking back to the website: [www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net](http://www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net). Remember, too, all this information **and more** is available in the book - available from the website.*