

November 2015

# *The African Violet Way*

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

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

I have first to apologise for missing producing the September edition of *The African Violet Way*. It was beyond my control. A scheduled hospital visit extended itself greatly and I wasn't home until almost the end of that month. So glad that's behind me now.

Although in hospital one can't do too much about growing plants, but there is plenty of time to think and plan, and plenty of time to look at plant photographs on the internet. Smart phones and tablets are so wonderful for people caught up in this sort of situation. In fact, the article on p.7 was begun on my phone one night in the hospital when sleep just seemed impossible.

We are now close to the end of the year, so I would like to wish you all a great holiday season, and a safe and healthy New Year.



## **Favorite Child**

Since I haven't been taking many photos lately and don't have many flowers anyway, I have been looking back through older photos. I have fallen in love all over again with a lot of beautiful African violets.

Here's an oldie that I haven't grown for a while. It always used to perform exceptionally well. A real beauty

Description is: *Semidouble white ruffled pansy/medium blue eye and rays, edge. Medium green, plain, quilted. G.Cox/ B.Johnson. 1982.*

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## African Violets for Everyone (with CD)

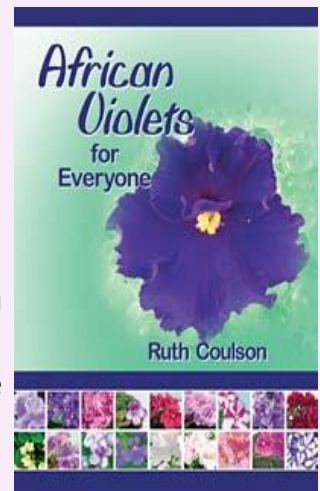
A book to guide your African violet growing

### Christmas Shopping Bargain Until December 31

Here is a Christmas gift for a houseplant loving friend or family member. At the special Christmas price of **\$22.00 AU** (reduced from \$28.00) plus package and postage. Why not treat yourself too? Two copies will cost only \$40.00 AU If you live in the US or many other places outside Australia this is an excellent time to purchase because of the currently favourable exchange rate for you.

*The book is packed with easily understood information about the plants and their requirements, plus 81 photographs.*

To purchase, go to the website orders page at: <http://www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net/how-to-order.html>.



## Cutting down?—it's automatic!

I keep saying I must cut down on the number of plants I grow. Since my African violets, and everything else, have been badly neglected for around three months, they aren't looking good. My husband has been looking after watering and fertilising. But nothing replaces regular inspection of the plants for which he has neither the inclination or the time. There was a small infestation of mites and other plants have well and truly outgrown their pots to the extent they really show the effects.

My way of taking care of the situation has been to discard. I have decided that if a plant needs too much work to bring it back to a good standard then out it goes! This has left me with a bit of space. I fear this may mean that I quickly replace with some new ones. Wonderful!



## Dish Garden

While having a nostalgic trawl through my photographs, I came across this one. It isn't the very best picture, (about 1984) but I am very fond of it.

I think it is perhaps the best dish garden I ever made because of its simplicity. I remember I had seven little cuttings of Pixie Blue that had struck and started to flower. I used them and finished off with some Sinningia 'White Sprite', a bit of club moss and my little elf. It was very easy.

During the show a visitor sought me out and said she had violets just like that in her garden.

## Hospital musings

It's how much you can achieve for your African violet hobby while lying flat on your back. You just need a little ingenuity, and some modern electronic devices would help. I had recent cause to know this when I was in hospital.

One of the first things I was capable of noticing was that when they gave me medication four or more times per day it was always tablets and capsules, handed out in little medicine cups. I have used some of these for potting tiny plants in the past, but I thought it might be a good thing to get hold of some more. I was told they were



never reused and they weren't even sent for recycling because all hospital waste is disposed of differently. So I was welcome to collect those my medication came in. I thought there would only be a few but as my hospital stay extended my collection increased. The big collection of dear little pots is now sitting on my husband's workbench waiting to have drain holes drilled.

They come in a few different sizes, but in the main they are less than 37mm ( around 1 ½ inches) across and even a little less than that in height. They are truly ideal for anything really small—undersized plantlets of miniatures, tiny suckers, flower stems for striking and so on.



And then once I was actually able to eat breakfast I noticed that the containers the orange juice came in were the loveliest little pots, so I began collecting them too. They are on the left of this illustration. On the right is one of the tiny containers in which I sometimes buy fruit. The sizes are similar around 70 mm (2¾ inches) across and 50mm (2 inches) high. Their shapes

are a little different. Excellent for growing plantlets before putting them in larger pots.

I don't know I will not have to buy small pots for a long time. When I first grew African violets I was told that transparent pots would not be successful. Something to do with the roots not filling the pot because they "preferred" the darkness of coloured pots or in the centre of the potting mix. While I wouldn't be bold enough to say they will always be successful, I would say that for me they have worked very well indeed in the past.

So I started writing this on my phone one night in the dark, and continued over a few days and nights. As you probably know stuff written down in the middle of the night often doesn't stand up to the scrutiny of the light of day. That was certainly so about a comment I had written "also bottom shelves and other awkward growing spots".

I'm not sure what that was about, but what was useful was that I noted down the websites I had been looking at browsing photographs of our favourite plants. I have quite run out of space this time, but will give a fuller list in the next copy of "The African Violet Way".

This one is where I started and you could do so too. Heaps of beautiful photos just to browse or perhaps to check your plant against the way it should be: African Violet Society of America, Photo Gallery—<http://www.avsa.org/> and choose Photo Gallery.

## If they are supposed to have only one crown why do I keep getting suckers?

It seems contradictory to many growers that there is a need to keep our rosette type African violets to one crown when they seem to want to produce side-shoots (suckers) so easily and so quickly. But it really is true that if you let the side-shoots develop there will be fewer flowers. Usually, that is. Occasionally an African violet that is supposed to be a rosette can perform beautifully if multicrowned. But this is not the way they normally behave.

So what causes the side-shoots to form?

- Stress on the plant can be a cause
- If the growing centre is damaged in any way (mites, fertiliser burn) side-shoots will normally develop.
- Periods of strong growth can produce many side-shoots. For me, this means for me, that they are more prevalent in autumn and spring than in summer or winter.
- If the plant is being disbudded for show or any other time when you want a surge in blossom production then the side-shoots tend to appear.

And what can be done about it?

- Try to keep plants growing steadily with no periods of drought or forgotten fertiliser.
- Inspect regularly for damage to the plants. Remove infested plants before there is a chance for the problem to spread. Over-fertilising should also be avoided. Centres can become damaged in a way that looks like fertiliser burn but can't be because others treated in the same way are perfectly fine. This probably means that there some part of the potting mix is giving up salts. I commonly blame a lump of peat moss. If this happens and you are sure the plant isn't suffering from mites, it should be leached thoroughly with warm water. This can be repeated several times at intervals of around a week. If the problem doesn't clear, repot the plant, or take a leaf and restart.
- At all other times keep a careful watch on your plants least a side-shoot should grow and upset the beautiful symmetry of the leaves.
- A rosette plant whether a miniature, semiminature or standard can grow into a bunch of side-shoots if not looked after. Never confuse these neglected plants with trailing African violets, which can have as many crowns as you can encourage them to produce.



*These semiminiatures became overgrown and congested with suckers when I had to neglect them for several months. Looks like I have some potting to do!*

*Minis and semiminis are often prone to this behaviour.*

## Does Size Really Matter (In African violets, that is)

So often we hear people comment enviously about the African violets in shows or in some private collections “But they’re so big”. While it is highly gratifying to hear these gasps of surprise and delight we are entitled to wonder whether an African violet that is large – say 350 mm or bigger is really any better than the same cultivar grown to a smaller size. Many people who have only seen the small, young plants of African violets offered for sale in supermarkets and similar stores are inclined to think that is the maximum size they can attain. These plants although they usually have an excellent little bunch of flowers are marketed when younger and at a smaller size because, amongst other reasons, that is more suitable for packing and transporting than really large plants would be. But if you like big plants, these shop beauties have great potential even though they may not have a name.

So consider the following points that seem relevant to the question:

- Not really if you like smaller plants.
- Yes if the reason that plants are small is because they are unhealthy or under fertilised.
- The benefit of growing a larger African violet is that it is likely to produce a more spectacular show of flowers. Flower stems grow from the leaf nodes so a plant with more young healthy leaves can produce more flowers. This doesn’t mean that old outside leaves that are clearly deteriorating should be retained. They won’t produce flowers and will detract from the look of the plant. Nor should side-shoots (suckers) be allowed to remain on the plant as they will often prevent the plant from flowering at all.
- The benefit of smaller plants is that they fit on a window sill more easily and, indeed, more can be fitted into a space.
- Small leaf and/or flower size in an African violet, as distinct from small plants, may indicate poor growing conditions or some health issues.
- If smaller plants are wanted, miniatures or semiminiatures can be grown. They come in every African violet colour, with all the various types of leaf.

*Another oldie, and an old photograph that I have recently used elsewhere. But I decided to use it to illustrate this article because it was one of the largest growing African violets I have ever had. It was also my first ever Best in Show, back in around 1983.*

*Lavender Delight—Double light lavender star/darker fantasy. Medium green, plain. Eyerdom, 1972.*

*I grew it for years and years, but it’s probably not much grown today.*





*These white and near white semiminiatures show just why we keep them small even though it is sometimes possible to grow them larger.*

*It would be a shame to lose their dainty characteristics.*

- If growing African violets for show, it is important to stick to the size restrictions for miniatures and semiminiatures. In shows, miniatures must be no larger than 150mm (six inches) in diameter and semiminiatures no larger than 200 mm (eight inches) in diameter. In home growing you might not worry too much if they were larger. To keep them small so you can enjoy their dainty characteristics, use small pots (say 20mm diameter), remove outside leaves as soon as they begin to deteriorate and repot often.
- There is quite a bit of difference in the size potential of standard African violets. Some will never be anything but smallish only growing to around 300mm (12 inches), while others can easily be double that in diameter. A good source of information for that is from other local growers, or from the African Violet Society of America's computer resource 'First Class'. There are many published sources too. It helps to know what to expect from various plants.

- Trailing African violets are also categorised as miniature, semiminiature and standard. It doesn't have much to do with the ultimate size of the plants but is more about the size of the leaves and flowers. Miniature and semiminiature trailers can actually be grown to quite large size when they become quite breathtaking with their huge quantity of flowers. Or, of course, you might prefer them kept small and dainty. Your choice! In this case size only matters if you think it does.
- The size category of any African violet is determined by the hybridiser. Many hybrids are registered or listed by the AVSA and their description, including their size is described in 'First Class'. This is very important in showing. Remember the apparent size of your plant might not be how that cultivar is meant to behave. A standard plant that is very young or for some reason just refuses to reach its expected size is not a miniature or semiminiature for showing! Ever! But of course, in home growing you can enjoy the plant for what it is at the time.

But most growers will want their plants to emulate the most huge, gorgeous specimens they have seen or of which they have seen photographs.

*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 2016. 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 'African Violets for Everyone' - available from the website.*