

November 2016

The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

A free download from www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net

First of all I would like to apologise for not putting out a newsletter in September.

There are times when I fear I am just overwhelmed by the things I am trying to do and I have to drop some of them out in order to retrieve my sanity. Sadly the September copy of The African Violet Way was something that had to be left.

Now, that I am able to produce a newsletter I am glad to report that my African violets seem to have turned the corner and are now growing and flowering much better than they have for some time. All it took was putting in the time regularly to do some consistent hard work. My attention had been sadly lacking for quite some time and it makes so much difference. It is great to get back into the plants. It is highly therapeutic as I am sure everyone knows.

I even prepared some African violets for the African Violet Association of Australia Show in October and won some awards for them. Very satisfying after having so few to be proud of for so long.

Now I have some spaces on the shelves since the show plants have gone. More potting to do. I did come home with half a dozen leaves. Those were potted very soon and now I await the plantlets.

Some plants to work on, soft music playing—life can be so calm and so good.



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Potting mix quandary

Back in July I was talking about potting mixes and what I could use as an alternative to sphagnum peat moss. I decided that the only convenient product for me to use would be coir peat. I went ahead and purchased some coir and made up the mix. This is the result I had.

I potted up six plants in my normal mix which is based on sphagnum peat and also six equivalent plants some of which were the same cultivars in a mix based on coir peat that I bought as a brick in a local branch of a national hardware store. I'm not giving them any free ads here because you can buy coir bricks in so many places!

I potted the plants on 28 July. Now I am fully aware that it can take quite a while for the effects of poor potting mix to make themselves obvious. However as it is now 26 November, I believe the four months is a good enough trial.

One way or the other I have sold or given away most of those dozen of plants, but here are a couple of photos of the plants grown in the coir mix. I think you will agree they don't look too bad. They are quite healthy and any problem you may see with the colour of the leaves is probably due to my photography rather than anything. They are a little open looking as I allowed them to flower while I was waiting to see how they turned out. I have now removed outside and baby leaves so that I can replot them into their final flowering pots.

I am confident enough to go ahead and use the coir mix for more plants. Not for everything yet, though! Caution always pays.



How to find out more about our favourite plant . . .

There are plenty of places you can find out about African violets. One of these days I must get up a really good list. In the meanwhile, though here are a couple of ideas for you.

These good sources of information that have come into existence fairly recently. Give them a try.

AVSA Weekly Growing Tips http://avsa.org/join_mailing_list

These are not long dissertations on any subject, they are just what they say: tips. Helpful and interesting for all growers. By clicking the above link you can have them emailed to you.

African Violets Down Under

This is a Facebook group that has been recently formed. If you are in Australia and on Facebook, search for this group and ask to join. Find out all the local info.

Variegation—don't you just love it?



These miniatures and semi-miniatures were all growing on a shelf together about six weeks ago. The variegation seemed so fresh and so delightful I couldn't bear not to put them into a tight group and take a photo.

There are two kinds of variegation amongst them. My real favourite is the "Tommie Lou" type variegation but centre (or Champion) variegation seems to be finding its way more and more onto my shelves. However it is they really can be a delight.

At the time of the photo the temperatures were still fairly cool so the variegation is very much evident. Now the weather has really warmed up to summer warmth even though it is still officially spring at the time of writing. Therefore the leaves show more green and less variegation than shown here.

This is something we need to look out for in growing variegated African violets. Most of them really look better when grown in fairly even mid-range temperatures all year around. They respond to heat by producing more green in the leaves and to cold by having less green and more variegation.

There is little you can do to promote variegation when your variegated plant has become quite green in summer, other than to keep it cool. If you grow under lights the bottom shelf is said to be the best but it really does vary from place to place. Be assured though that the beautiful variegation will normally return with the winter.

If your variegated plant has become very variegated in the winter and has very little green at all it can look absolutely beautiful—so delicate. But don't be fooled. These delicate looking plants are indeed just that. They are so delicate that they may well decline as soon as they experience one really hot day. It pays to try to keep them a little bit green.

What can you do? Some people suggest applying a high nitrogen fertiliser. That has never worked for me but of course it may help for others. Another suggestion is to water with a solution of Epsom Salts (one quarter teaspoon per litre). This also may help. Yet a third suggestion is to put the plant in a terrarium type container. This could make keep the plant a little warmer and thus promote green leaves.

The best solution is not to let problems caused by low temperatures happen at all. This can only be done by keeping variegated African violets in the warmest positions you have, and if necessary with a dome terrarium as mentioned above.

As far as propagation is concerned, it will be best not to plant leaves of variegates in late autumn or winter.

Above all, I recommend patience. Winter problems soon give way to summer problems!

So what are the types of variegation that you may find?

By far the most commonly seen is “Tommie Lou” variegation, as shown in the first photograph. It is characterised by an edging on each leaf that is white, cream or even pinkish. There can be some diversity in the leaves of different African violets of this type. Sometimes the variegation is just an edging (the ideal in my mind) but at other times it may cover more of the leaf in an almost all-over pattern.



The second photograph shows “mosaic” variegation. The good news is that it is little affected by temperatures. The bad news is that there are far fewer African violets that have this type of pattern. It shows an all-over pattern of chartreuse markings. It can be very beautiful.



By far the most likely to be affected by temperature are the plants with “crown” or “Champion” variegation. I have shown a photo of a whole plant here as it is the only way to demonstrate it properly.



The colour of the variegation may be cream, white, tan, or pink. It affects the centre leaves. In ideal conditions they remain coloured as in this example, and the outer leaves remain green. As the leaves age they pick up more green colour.

It is wonderful to have African violets that look absolutely gorgeous without any flowers at all.

Then there are the non-variegates . . .

By that I mean what may look like variegation but is really cultural. Perhaps you read the article about shock-marks on African violet leaves. See these two photos. This is definitely cultural, probably caused by using water of a very different temperature to that of the atmosphere. Normally this will be watering with cold water. Sometimes plants are sensitive and will react this way to repotting. (See the accompanying two photos)



And, of course, pseudo-variegation . . .

This is my name for the situation when you find a plant in your collection that looks as though it has spontaneously become variegated. This is often an all-over pattern in white, cream, light green or pink. Trouble is, for me, when this happens it is difficult, probably impossible, to reproduce it. The variegation has always just been on part of the plant (half or a quarter) and eventually grows out. Disappointment follows when the elation dies.



African violet jewels—it's always about colour



Of course it matters that an African violet has a pleasing shape and that it is strong and healthy. But the impression of colour is always what strikes me first. Even with leaves it is their colour that first strikes me. When I enter my plant room it is the impression of lushness and colour that takes my breath away.



But what colours do I favour? Ah, now that's the problem.



Sometimes I am very attracted by pastels, really enjoying their delicacy. Other times it is bicolours of all kinds. At one period I wanted all the fantasy violets I could get hold of.



Sometimes it is a specific colour. Right now I just like the strong rich colours—the African violet jewels.



I seem to have quite a lot of these at the moment. When I look at the plants themselves and at the photographs I have accumulated over the years, I find I have covered some of the most precious of all jewels. I can see sapphires, rubies, garnets, amethysts and many others. My photos may not be an exact rendition of the original colour but I have done my best to capture the essence of each one.



Now picture these as flowering plants set off by gorgeous green leaves. I prefer dark green leaves at the moment, even better if they are variegated on a dark green base.



How lush, how lovely!



The African Violet Association of Australia's 2016 African Violet and Gesneriad Show

This show was held on October 22 and 23. I have reproduced here photos of some of the plants that particularly appealed to me.



At left is a glorious plant of 'Rob's Boolaroo' that was Grand Champion African Violet for top grower, Dennis Halton



On the left here is 'Blue Secret', best new African violet seedling. I thought it particularly lovely and was lucky enough to come home with a leaf.



At the right is 'Daydream' a really beautiful bicolour and below 'Gentility' both of which are great favourites of mine. Lovely to see such good examples.



Above, Best Mini/Semimini in the show, 'Rob's Boogie Woogie', also grown by Dennis Halton

Below is 'Frosted Denim' a really good older miniature.



To see more photos from this show visit the Association's website:
www.africanviolet.org.au



Announcement of Super Special Offer!

Are you thinking Christmas presents yet?

To celebrate the uploading of a revised and improved version of my website (www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net), we have a **super special offer**.

The basic price of each book is reduced from \$28.50 (AU) to **\$21.00 (AU)**

The basic price of each CD is reduced from \$9.00 (AU) to **\$8.00 (AU)**

This special offer will run until 31 December 2016

Unfortunately the postage prices have had to be increased a little. But the above reduction will more than compensate. Pricing detail can be seen on the website

My African Violet Rules

- Don't keep African violets in the dark or you won't get flowers
- Don't keep them very wet or they will rot
- Don't let them go dry. Wilting is ugly and is unhealthy for the African violet.
- Don't let them be dirty and dusty because dirt is ugly and keeps the light out
- Do understand that the two most important components of potting mix are air and moisture
- Don't try out new fertiliser or potting mix on your whole collection at a time. Be cautious and realise that it can take up to three months for problems to show themselves.
- Do be generous with light and with love, but be a little bit mean with fertiliser. Of course they need some nutrients, but less is often better than more.
- Don't take on a sick plant and believe you will bring it back to health. You may simply get the rest of your collection infested. If you must bring home that orphan to care for, keep it quarantined from the rest of your plants.
- If you have anything new, unusual or precious—DO SHARE. That is the most important way there is to prevent your wonderful new acquisition from eventually being lost.

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