November 2015

The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

A free download from www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net

I am finally bringing my plants up to date. Sadly I have had to discard quite a few as they were in very bad condition indeed. Some of the discarded plants were so loved I did take the best leaf I could find and set them to propagate. I have done a lot of repotting to help the rest to come up to their potential. I hope to detail the procedure for this in the next issue of this newsletter.

Rob's Slap Happy

This is a semi-miniature that never seems to fail for me. I would say it is today's favourite, but it has been sitting there looking really pretty for some weeks. Masses of flowers are one of its specialties.

The shape isn't too bad either, considering the period of neglect it suffered.

Description is: *Semidouble dark coral pansy. Crown variegated dark green white, cream and pink, quilted. R Robinson, 2001.* ***I love it!***

Propagating from Flower Stems

Earlier last year I started an experiment with flower stem propagation. It didn't work out well because we had a severe storm just after I had planted the stems and 5 days without power proved fatal to them. I wrote about it in the March 2015 African Violet Way. My main aim was to see what the relative difference was between growing from the two little stems at the base of the flower cluster on a stem, compared with using the little leaves on the divided stems above them and with using the calyces.

Well, I tried to get back to doing this trial, but I should have known better than to do it in June, one of the cooler months of our year. I was going overseas at the end of June to be away for three weeks. One of the things I did was to set up the experiment again just before I left. All the little pots were placed safely in a propagating box under the lights. The weather was still fairly warm, and I hoped for a normal June. I expected most propagations to have rooted well by the time I came back.

Disaster, though! I didn't allow for the fact that as soon as I left the weather turned really cold, colder than it has been for years. And I wasn't here to do any coddling when the temperatures fell. The result ruination—almost all were dead. I think the pots were a bit too moist for such cold temperatures. I intended to do the whole thing again in October but that was not to be.

Strangely enough I have found that two pots of the little stems planted in June that didn't die at the time, have not only continued to survive but have actually thrived once they were fertilised and finally potted out.

In these pots I had planted 8 flower stems (the pot on the left) and 5 secondary stems (pot on the right.

They were all planted on 16 June. The first photograph was taken on 10 November when they were finally liberated from the propagating box where they had been left with no fertiliser for five months.

The second photograph was taken on 15 December after they had been receiving more light and some fertiliser for five weeks. What a difference!

At that stage I potted them out individually. There were three little plants from the pot of five secondary stems and there were eight little plans from the pot of eight little flower stems. These were placed on a community wick watering tray. Now, less than five weeks later the third photo shows that the growth has been so fast that many of them really need potting again.

It is now easy to see the variation in colour of these little plantlets. I suspect that those with the darker leaves will be plants that will have solid blooms and not be true. Of course, with so few survivors of my trial I have proved nothing I set out to do.

But I have shown that adequate light and fertiliser plus repotting when necessary gives faster growth!

Wicks

I believe I have said before that I prefer wick watering above all other methods for growing my violets. It suits me best because it allows me to provide an adequate reservoir of fertiliser solution for the plants and at the same time means that I don't have to be on hand to refill every day or two.

But what do we use for wicks? I have talked about that before, too. Not withstanding the various options I have recently been using acrylic knitting yarn. At one stage I was using black yarn because it didn't look so grotty when a little bit of algae grew on it. But then I found that dull. I started buying purple to harmonise with the violet flowers, I thought.

Last time I bought yarn I found this one and thought "why not?" It has a host of African violet colours!

Heinz's Seduction

Here's an interesting thing. Don't you love the way African violets keep doing the unexpected?

If you don't know Heinz's Seduction, here is a photo of it. It is described as *Semidouble-double red-purple star/white and pink mottling. Dark green, plain, quilted/red back. H. Dornbusch.*

I think it is a pretty special plant. Sometimes the flowers have less mottling and sometimes more, but it usually looks quite spectacular. It flowers well and grows to a good shape. In other words it is a plant that I really love and hope to continue to grow.

Now look at the second photograph. Plain quilted leaves with red back? But what about the spots?

This particular plant has made a unilateral decision to have fantasy leaves as well as fantasy flowers. Some leaves have more of the mottling than others. In most cases it doesn't show through to the front of the leaf, but in a few cases it does making lighter green spots on the dark leaves.

The hotter weather seems to have reduced the number of leaf markings but I hope they will be more pronounced again in cooler times.

I believe Heinz Dornbusch, the hybridiser has also had plants turn up with leaves like this. What fun!

African Violet Resources

In the last issue of "The African Violet Way" I said I would include this time some more sites where you can browse and enjoy African violet pictures. Here are some more, although my favourite would still be the African Violet Society of America with its gallery of photographs at http://www.avsa.org/Aphotos

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Holtcamp Greenhouses – Optimara - http://www.optimara.com/
Home of all those wonderful Optimara violets. Good information, but Oh, the photographs. Click on the "Variety Identification" link to start.

Violet Barn - https://www.violetbarn.com/shop/index.php
The whole of the website (home of Rob's African violets) is interesting, but I really enjoy the photographs and information in the catalogue pages. Good way of checking how those Rob's hybrids that you own are correctly named, too.

Lyndon Lyon Greenhouses, Inc. - http://lyndonlyon.com/store/
You don't have to be buying to stroll through the online store. Lovely photos of flowers and leaves of many hybrids, including Lyon introductions. Even better if you can be a purchaser!

African Violet Association of Australia - http://www.africanviolet.org.au/
Fifteen galleries of photographs from Shows. Click on the "Photo Gallery" link.

African Violet Society of Canada - http://www.avsc.ca/gallery_main.htm
There are photos of many hybrids with some emphasis on Canadian hybridisers.

Svenska Saintpauliasallskapet - http://www.saintpauliasallskapet.se/bildarkiv/index.html
This is the site of the Swedish Saintpaulia Society and on this page there are links to galleries of photographs. Don't be frightened off by the fact that it is in Swedish. When you click on the index letters you will find galleries of photos and you will easily understand the names for the majority are in English. Clicking on the thumbnail brings up a larger photograph, sometimes more than one.

Chimera AV - http://chimeraav.com/
This blog has such a lot of useful information regarding African violets with this kind of flower. Since we are talking of browsing photographs, click on the Image Gallery link.

Fialkovod - http://www.fialkovod.ru/
I know it's in Russian but I really enjoy the numerous photographs of African violets that I will never own!

Sonia's African Violet Links - http://www.soniabrock.ca/av.html
If you would like links to other African violet sites.

Saintpaulia Ancestry Project - https://saintpauliaancestry.wordpress.com/
If you are ever wondering about the origins of some of your African violets, this is the page for you. Many hybridisers are listed, with lists of plants and their ancestry. There are photographs of some but it is not basically a site for pictures but for information..

Last of all, if you still want to browse more African violet photos, Google "African violets" and click the image link. Wow. What a colour hit.

A little bit of extra humidity

Even living in a reasonably humid climate I find there are times when my plants, or perhaps just specific plants, need a bit more humidity than is actually available.

When does that happen?

1. When ambient humidity falls below 35% or whatever figure you find appropriate. As our periods of low humidity are usually fairly short-lived I usually take no action until it falls a bit below this level.

2. When raising seeds. Of course only the seed-bed need experience the raised humidity.

3. When trying to revive wilted plants that have been allowed to become too dry. Rather than flooding with water it is better to water moderately and then keep in high humidity for a few days until they again become turgid.

4. When propagating from leaf. Some people find additional humidity helps speed up rooting, but it is by no means a universal practice.

5. When encouraging seed pods to form in hybridising.

Clearly only number 1 above is a case where the whole growing area, whether it is an entire room or simply a window sill, needs more humidity. In really dry climates growers use room humidifiers. In a humid climate where dry periods are few that would not be a worthwhile solution.

So what can you do?

There are quite a few tricks that people use to solve this problem. Some of them are more effective than others.

1. Mist spraying with slightly warm water. The evaporation of the moisture from the leaves of the plants should boost the humidity around the plants. The trouble is, in hot dry weather when it is most desirable to increase humidity the evaporation is so quick that it is almost impossible to keep up spraying often enough. Once or twice a day isn't anywhere near enough.

2. Placing open dishes of water among the plants so the evaporation from them will gently increase the humidity around the plants. This is probably somewhat better, but in a growing area with good air circulation the humidity is rapidly whisked away by the moving air.

3. Using capillary matting for a watering system. The damp matting under the plants constantly adds humidity to the surrounds.

4. Using open water trays for wick watering for the same reason.

5. Reducing the air circulation on dry days by closing windows and turning off fans.

This last is what I favour and I also use open water trays for wick watering. It doesn't entirely solve the problem of low humidity but certainly improves matters.

But what if you just want to raise the humidity for a plant or two, for a few newly planted leaves, or for a pot into which you have planted seeds? There are lots of ways to do this too.

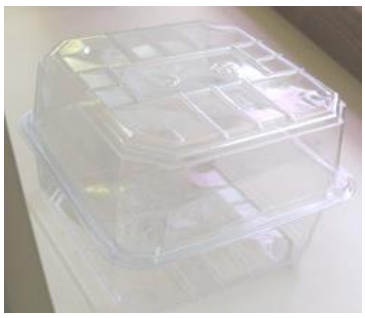
It is possible to purchase propagating trays with covers including controlled ventilation. This is one of the most expensive of the methods, but still won't break the bank.

Just use a simple plastic bag. This would be the cheapest method but probably doesn't look all that good on the plant shelf. You may want something better in the way of a terrarium.

There are so many other products that can be used to encase plant or plants for a short while. Many of them are recycled packaging. It just depends on how large a container you need.

Note: Such containers also are excellent for keeping a plant or plants in quarantine if there seems to be some problem. It is important not to let problems run riot through a whole collection.




Make-shift terrariums

One of the good things about growing African violets is that it is a fairly inexpensive hobby. In looking for suitable terrariums, it is possible to recycle all sorts of things. A proper terrarium may be expensive, but many of these are "throw-away items".

From top left, clockwise: packaging for cherries with drain holes and ventilation holes, storage box suitable for several plants with ventilation around the top edges, cover for a pack of 50 CDs and cover from shop-bought cake, cheap glass brandy balloon sold for a candle holder, take-away food container upended over a pot, tall enclosure made from two plastic packs originally for mushrooms.

Warning: Don't enclose African violets in very high temperatures. It is very easy to completely rot them out.

Note that the majority of these have ventilation holes. It is really important that the plants should have some air.

*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. Otherwise just keep checking back to the website: www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net. Remember, too, all this information **and more** is available in the book 'African Violets for Everyone' - available from the website.*