

July 2018



The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

A free download from www.africanvioletsforeveryone.net

No matter how many African violets you have grown there is always one more that attracts you. And, indeed I think I am falling in love again.

This photo is 'Rivermist Pearls'. Isn't it exquisite? I was given a plant only a few months ago.

It is a standard size violet from J. Baker. The description in First Class reads "Single-semidouble



light pink star/white puff fantasy. Variegated medium green and pink, ovate, quilted, glossy/variable white-spotted back"

What could I possibly say about this that it doesn't already say for itself"

So beautiful!

The headline photograph above is an Australian hybrid 'RD's Illusion'. From Reg Townsend it packs a big punch for colour.

Super Special—Still available

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I have inadvertently been saying in The African Violet Way that this special concludes at the end of June. It doesn't. It is the end of September. It has always been correct on the website. Apologies.



Adventures with Sticky Insect Traps



I usually hang sticky yellow Insect Traps around the shelves in my plant room. The present ones had become covered in dead insects and most of them had already been tossed out for that reason.

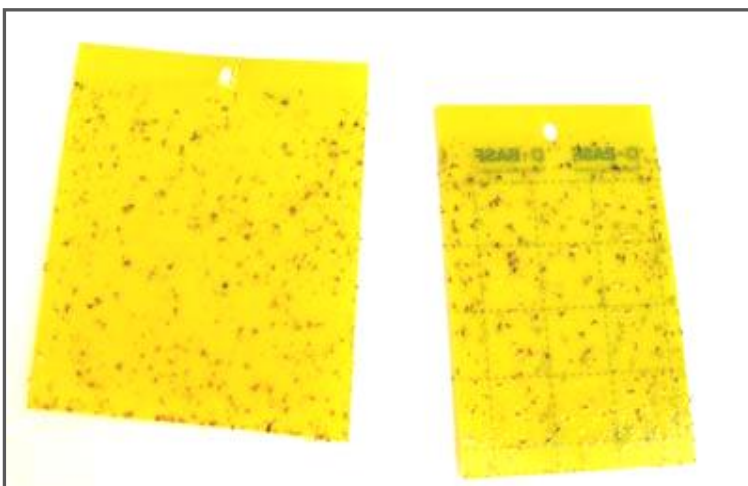
Now it was time to replace the lot. I went to town and bought a new packet. These traps are bright yellow which is said to attract the bugs which stick to them and die. They are quite long so I like to cut them in half so they don't dangle quite so close to flowers and leaves.

What a difficulty in hanging them in place!

It took me most of the morning. Believe it – to hang up 10 sticky traps! Employing hooks, sticky tape, twist-ties, lengths of yarn etc. You see I am clever enough (from experience) to know not to hang them in easily accessible positions like on the front of the light stand or at the end where I might reach in to attend to a plant. If they are hung where they can be brushed against there is always trouble. They are so sticky. They stick to plants, to clothing, to your hair – in fact anything that touches.

I had therefore decided to hang them in less accessible positions. The trouble was, they are, well, less accessible. So, after damaging three plants, losing innumerable hooks down into the nether regions under the light stands, and twisting myself in two, I finally did the job. They had tried to stick to the wall, to the light stand itself and to me. Yes, two of them have pieces of leaf stuck on them, several have hair, and a couple have fluff from my jacket. One almost disappeared for good behind the stand, but I managed to get it out using the easy-reach tool that I have to use to pick up things from the floor. Now let them get to work catching bugs.

So the big question is – Are these traps any use in eliminating the various insects that attack our African violets?



Well, I'm not really sure. Certainly they catch any that happen to fly too close and this turns out to be quite a lot. And equally certainly they will not solve the problem of a serious infestation. One would need to take more certain action in that case. I suppose we could say they catch some and may be an indication of the presence of the various insects.

Even though they are a bit ugly, or very ugly when covered in dead things (see previous page), over time they do catch a lot and in my opinion the only good bug is a dead bug. And they do no harm to the plants – well not usually. They only do when the clumsy owner drops them on top of the plants!

Now, I am told that blue traps are more effective for thrips. Perhaps I should get some but the shop didn't have any. I'm not sure where I could get them, so I could try making my own.



Making insect traps yourself

You need to start with bright blue cardboard (or yellow if that is what you want) as the basis of the trap. Plastic would be even better and would really be essential in an outdoor area or greenhouse where overhead watering would soon destroy cardboard. For our African violets, indoors, cardboard would be good enough I am sure.

Cut your cardboard to the size trap you want. Use a hole-punch to make a hole in the centre near the top of each one, for attaching a hook, twist tie or other hanging apparatus. In fact you should attach that at this point. Don't forget to test hang the trap in position.

Now you must coat both sides of the cardboard or plastic with Vaseline or some other sticky, non-drying coating. I have heard of honey being suggested but I think that might just attract flies and ants. When you have carefully coated the trap on both sides, just hang it up in position.

Easy. What could possibly go wrong?

Coir—a long story!

Yes—well, there will be more about coir. Not immediately however.

I have created various mixes using peat moss, using coir and using other materials. I have potted plants in all of them. Confusingly they are all doing pretty well at this point. Some have been potted for six months, most of them only 3 to 4 months. I think I have to wait longer to report on how these work out. Why are they doing well when not all grew properly before?

I have a theory, of course—but later for that. . .

Reward your plants for their beauty



Remember, plants get hungry and thirsty just as people do!

Regular fertilising and moisture at root level gets results



Hehe! I escaped from the other page!

Near Death Experiences

Any of us would love to have a collection of perfect plants always with a profusion of flowers, but that isn't what happens much of the time. Every little while I find a plant that just doesn't want to grow. In fact, that is threatening to die. Whether this is caused by a difficulty with the potting mix, the fertilising, or some other factor, I just don't know. In the last few years I have had more of these things happening. The reason is undoubtedly that I have been unable to look after the plants adequately.

Lately I have repotted, watered, fertilised, groomed—in fact everything that will foster healthy and floriferous growth. And the results have been good. But what of the little “sickies”?

I have a few plants that have been lingering for some time. In fact a long time! Yes, other people grow them so I could discard what I am struggling with and beg a leaf to start again. And yet, snatching a plant back from the jaws of death can be really satisfying. Sad to say, some plants may recover after these experiences and be changed forever.

But you can be lucky!

I have always liked 'Playful Spectrum' [Single-semidouble white fluted star/blue fantasy, wide lavender-pink band]. It is a standard violet from Sorano. But it got down to just one small plantlet that refused to grow any further. More recently it got going again and I now have a nicely shaped plant of around 250 mm across. When buds began to appear I was very dubious that the flowers would come true. It is quite prone to mutate anyway.



Look at this, though! Flowers perfect in every respect. How lucky am I! (not the best photo but I have now taken all the flowers and buds off to let it grow, so I can't repeat)

The same can't be said for 'I Feel Pretty'. These three photos show it as it should and used to be, as it became (a chimera look that still reproduced very well by leaf), and what it has become. It's not worth going any further, even with the other plant I have that is likely the same. Time to give up.



I am glad to say that 'Victorian Flirt', a beautiful fantasy chimera has come through its tribulations well. I got so excited when I saw some perfect blooms on it that I took all of them off to encourage a larger plant. Quite forgot to take a photo. But here is one of how it was before.

It really is good to see some of these plants their old selves again. But not all!



Two demonstrations instead of one!

How often I find that I set out to demonstrate one set of African violet characteristics and end up showing another. That's exactly what has happened this time.

Remember the two plants whose photos I showed last time looking at the difference when not grown in enough light? I said I would take the poor deprived one and place it back under the fluorescent tubes like the other one to see if it would improve. And so I did.



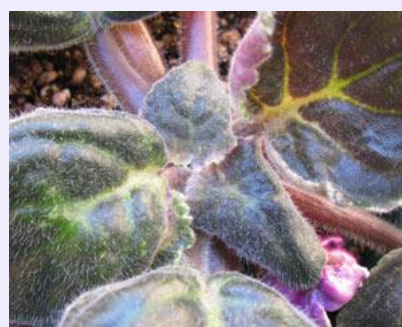
I didn't explain last time that the reason I put the plant on the left of the photograph in the spare room was that I had taken it to a meeting where there were many other African violets. When you do this it is always good to isolate any plants for a couple of months to be sure there are no free-loaders coming into your collection this way. On this occasion I decided to place it in another room.

After I took the photos, I placed the plant in a large box with a completely transparent lid before letting it join the rest of my collection under the lights.



And a good thing I did keep it enclosed.

It seemed to be progressing well and the leaves started to flatten out, although the inner leaves didn't look as though they would ever be as large as they should be. But about four weeks later it became obvious that the plant had a mite infestation. See the second and third photographs, taken outdoors while the plant was on its way to the rubbish bin. The final photo is the plant that had been under lights all the time, photographed in a similar position to the other one. What a difference you can see. There are even some flowers. Though to be honest, the poor deprived and infested plant was also producing a couple of buds.



Whilst isolation is a precaution I like to take as a matter of course in these cases, I have never actually seen it shown to be necessary before. It certainly makes me glad I took such care.



And that's what I have successfully demonstrated. Make sure you isolate any plants you have had out of your collection, or that are new to your collection. Nobody wants a full scale infestation of mites or thrips through all plants.

Avoidance is always the best pest control.

How long does it take to grow a violet from leaf?

Part 2

In the last issue, I showed a leaf that had been planted in March 2018. Subsequent photographs showed that by 8 May there were numerous plantlets growing.

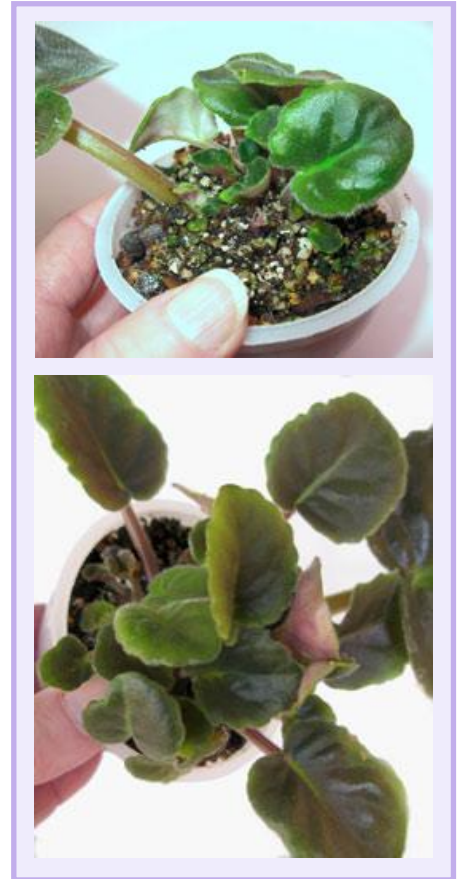
Since then there has been rapid growth. Once the very hot weather let up we were into ideal growing conditions for African violets. The top photograph was taken on 18 June. Yes, a couple of plantlets are probably big enough to plant out but we are coming into winter so better to leave it. Late August would be best. The second photograph was taken on 18 July. Now the largest plantlets are way oversized and really should be planted separately. I am always telling people not to do serious repotting in the depths of winter but leave it until spring unless you have ideal conditions. Well my conditions are probably not entirely ideal but I decided to go ahead anyway, because to delay would impede the progress of the plants in this demonstration

It was a week after taking the photograph before I had a chance to do the deed. I tipped the whole thing out of the pot. The photos show the steps involved. I separated the plantlets. Photograph 3 shows the resulting plantlets—or some of them.

There are eight plantlets that I separated out. There were at least another eight that were too immature to consider. They have been discarded. Of those I separated, only the first three will be potted up. There was a time when I would have potted the next three as well, but I really don't need the plants. You also should consider your needs before you decide how many to pot up.

Knowing that Corroboree is a lusty grower I have potted them into shallow 70 mm pots. They will quickly fill the pots with roots and be ready to pot on by early September at the latest. By then the conditions will be warmer so they will grow and flower quickly thereafter. Or so I hope!

I used a normal African violet potting mix both for striking the leaves and for potting up the plantlets. Sometimes growers choose to use a perlite/vermiculite mix for the leaves and a mix of that and an African violet mix to pot up the plantlets. I have



not found that necessary for my growing conditions.

Then here is a photograph of the three little plants in their three pots. I watered them thoroughly and let them drain. I then placed them in a transparent box with the lid on and under the lights. But, oh dear, I notice that the middle one has moved away from the centre of the pot. I will fix that tomorrow. It is best to make sure that plants are in the centrally located when very young. It makes it easier to keep them that way when they are mature.



They will remain in the box for one to two weeks until they seem settled in their pots. After that they will be on a reservoir tray being watered by wick. I will only use half strength fertiliser for the first few weeks and then I use exactly the same fertiliser as I have been using for growing the leaves, and that I will use when they are large enough to flower.



By the next issue of 'The African Violet Way' they should be good young plants.

I have included a photograph of the mother leaf. It had expanded greatly during the time it was producing plantlets and the leaf stalk (petiole) had lengthened too. You can gauge the size of the leaf by comparing with my hand. Quite large!

Some time ago I had cut the top half of the mother leaf off. It was not needed on such a large leaf, and I wanted to prevent its weight from tipping the pot over. Now I have neatened the cut across the leaf, and have shortened the stem, cutting at a slant. As you can see it is perfectly good and healthy and could be planted to grow a new crop of plantlets—had I wanted to have a couple of shelves of the same variety!

So, yes, you can plant the leaf again if you need more plantlets of the same ones. So long as the leaf is healthy it will work fine.

But beware. Propagating is easy, and is fun. Finding space and caring for the resultant plants is often not at all so.

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