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The African Violet Way

An E-Newsletter by Ruth Coulson

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I first have to apologise for the absence of a September 2018 issue of this Newsletter. My health problems made it impossible for me to do anything much. Even this issue is running late and is rather skimpy because of computer “issues”. Things should be fine next time!

I had begun a number of demonstrations but as it happened the fact the plants were disregarded for so long meant that the results were unclear. If all goes well I will be discussing the coir potting mix issue in the next issue of this newsletter.

When I came to looking for photographs for this page, I discovered I had taken all the flowers and buds off without making photographs of them.



Never mind—I searched through my extensive photo archive and came up with this—*Charisma*. Yet another Kent Stork hybrid which I grew some years ago. I thought it the most luscious thing I had ever seen at that time. Delicate and strong at the same time.

The headline picture is *Ballet Fairy Queen*. This is one I wish I still had. The flowers are most striking, although I remember the curly foliage was a little unruly!

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Recovering from disaster - again

Recently I was unable to look after my plants for some eight weeks or so. For the plants the results were not good! It is becoming something of a habit, having times like this.

I had been fairly happy with the way my plants were looking. I had finally just about caught up with potting. I say just about because nobody who has a substantial collection is ever really caught up. They keep on needing attention! But still, I had lots of flowers and was hopeful about a show that was coming up at the end of October. But, I am told, pride goes before a fall.

The worst thing that happened with my African violets was that most of them were dry at some stage, in some cases for quite a while. Violets normally react badly to be dried out. Even if they don't wilt they do stop growing and may or may not recover well when rewatered.

And, as soon as I wasn't hovering over the plants on a daily basis some thrips found their way in and there were even a couple of plants that looked suspiciously like early infestations of mites. Not a good scenario, but none of it beyond recovery. And, also, as this was spring, the time of fresh new growth, many of the plants were filled with huge crops of suckers that would have normally been removed when very small. Because of this many of the plants had become distorted and shapeless.



Even after being re-watered the many plants looked like this. Leaves in poor condition, few flowers and so many suckers.

Lack of flowers didn't matter since they were going to be removed, but the suckers represent a big job in tidying the plant. They occurred because the whole episode happened in a period of maximum growth.

So, what to do? Tear my hair out? Give up and throw them away? No way. If we want to keep on growing these plants we just have to set to and do what needs to be done.

Watering

My first step was to fill all water wells and trays so that plants could drink again and become hydrated. This meant they would suffer less further damage, and it would be possible to see just what state they were in and what needed doing.

Initial spraying

The plants were all sprayed for thrips and mites before any further action was taken. It was obvious to me that doing any of the tidying and cleaning up work was going to take time, so something had to be done to slow down the bugs.

Photographs

I decided to take a few photographs for this article before going any further

Removal of flowers and buds

This is most important Even on an apparently healthy, unaffected plant there can be thrips hiding in the flowers. It isn't worth taking the chance of starting over again.

Second spraying

Temperatures at the time were fairly cool, so I sprayed again after about a week. Not all flowers had been removed at this time as I was then, and am still, only able to do a certain amount each day. But the spraying had precedence.

Remaining flowers and buds removed

Temperatures were increasing so that it was necessary to go remove more buds from the plants already treated. It was good to get the whole job completed.

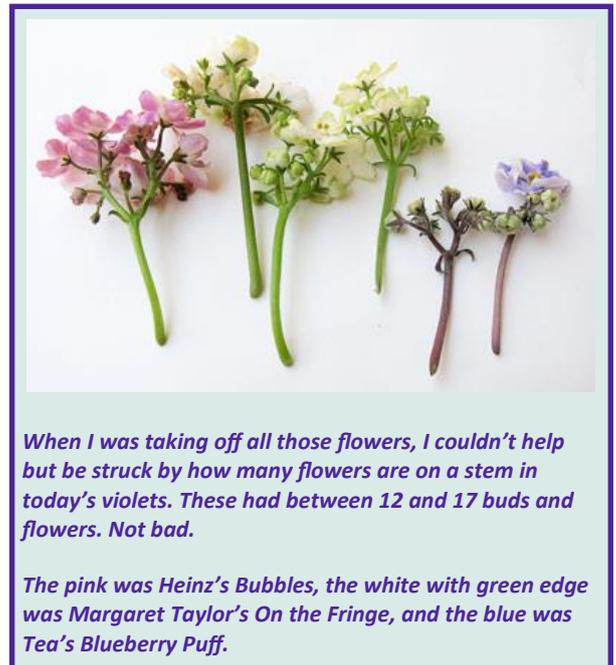
Third spraying after another week

With increasing temperatures this spraying for thrips should have been carried out sooner, as they breed more quickly in warmth. It seemed important to get the whole of the disbudding done first, though.

This is the present position, but the following steps remain to be taken.

Grooming

Now it would appear that the main job is to go through all the plants and remove any suckers – quite a job – and at the same time to keep on taking off any more flower buds that appear. Many outside leaves will also need to be removed because of the distortion to the shapes of the plants.



When I was taking off all those flowers, I couldn't help but be struck by how many flowers are on a stem in today's violets. These had between 12 and 17 buds and flowers. Not bad.

The pink was Heinz's Bubbles, the white with green edge was Margaret Taylor's On the Fringe, and the blue was Tea's Blueberry Puff.



So was anything saved from the destruction?

Well, yes. This plant of Chiffon Print, a long-time favourite of mine was just beginning to flower and had heaps of buds. It looked healthy so I took it in to be my dinner table decoration for a week or so. In fact it has lasted at least a month.

Of course it too has many suckers, but I decided they didn't matter too much in this case. When it finishes flowering, or when I decide I have had enough of it on the dinner table, I will remove the suckers and grow them on. The plant was destined to be isolated until I was sure of its health. I now feel this is not necessary as it has proved itself and will move it back into the violet room in due course.

Can't have too many plants of Chiffon Print!

Repotting

This step may be a little while in the future before it is concluded but it will be the fastest way to get the plants back into shape and growing sturdily again. It will take me some months to work through the plants.

Another round of spraying for thrips

Since the initial sprayings were carried out before all the buds and flowers were taken off, it now needs to be done again. I will be using an alternative spray for the thrips and continuing to keep the buds off the plants. Three sprayings are to be done, and at rather more frequent intervals because of increased temperatures.

But, oh, how I wish I had taken a photo of the plant room in August when the plants were looking good.

What is this?



It isn't a cleverly photo-shopped image, and it isn't a violet that has half sported.

It is nothing but a photo to show how not to take photographs.

While looking through my archive for the photographs I put on the front page I came upon this and thought it would be worth talking about.

It is scanned from a transparency, and would have been taken sometime in the 1980s. The plant was a very pretty violet called 'City of Angels'. It was a Gordon Boone hybrid, whose description is

"Double violet two-tone star. Dark green, quilted red-back (foliage)". For me it was always single to semi-double and the colour was more like that of the flower in the left of my photograph. Any two tone effect that I ever saw was attributable to the "veining" in the petals. But it was certainly a little one that did change colour depending on the light that was shining on it.

So what is happening here? The difference in colour is because of the light. Light is important both in growing the plants and in photography. Both in intensity and colour.

The flower on the left was receiving natural light from a bright window. The flower on the right was lit by camera flash. The film we were using then for transparencies was prone to "kill" the blues and that is what happened.

The result was far from what was wanted, but as that was before digital cameras, one couldn't preview the photograph, and just had to wait until it was processed. Even though we were using a one day professional photo lab, it was always an anxious time opening the box of transparencies and looking at them.

I vividly remember one box of 26 where we discarded all but one. Good old days? We probably only kept this one as it such a good "bad example".

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

Part 3

You may remember that back in March this year I planted a leaf of Corroboree to demonstrate how long it takes to produce a flowering plant from leaf.

In the July issue of *The African Violet Way* I showed that there were many plantlets that I separated out and that I planted just three in separate pots.

They were all growing happily on a small tray that just suited their small size by early August. Unfortunately this was yet another demonstration that was somewhat “inconvenienced” by my health problems. When I was finally able to look at the plants I found that these had been growing apace. I think I mentioned that Corroboree is a lusty grower. It had lived up to its reputation.

I completed my previous article by saying “By the next issue of ‘*The African Violet Way*’ they should be good young plants”.



Well, considering the time involved they were well overgrown in their tiny pots with roots growing out the drain holes. They were crowding each other badly. Each of them had flowers and buds which I quickly removed.

As the photograph shows they are badly misshapen because of crowding. The leaves are not growing in neat overlapping rows both because of this and because they were coming into bloom at such an early stage of development. They are not “good” young plants by any means. But they have potential.



Of course the matter that urgently needs to be dealt with is to pot them into larger pots. I am ashamed to say I still have not done that, one month later. But soon, soon. They have to take their turn!

I have actually spread them out quite a bit in the hope that they will flatten out before I get to them. Even so, I will have quite a few leaves to remove and the roots will certainly need to be teased out.

The photo at left is a flower to show just how lovely this simple purple African violet is.

Just Reminiscing

I had intended to use this page for the final conclusions from my ruined potting mix demonstrations. But I thought I had been gloomy enough for the time being and so I am now just celebrating African violets.

Top left is Akis (from Margaret Taylor), Top right is RD's Kerry (Reg & Dorothy Townsend), lower right is Jays' Frosted Burgundy (J&J White). All beautiful local hybrids. And at the bottom how my plant shelves looked only a few years ago. I will get back there. Just as soon as health and other problems stop jumping out at me!!



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