



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from Chapter newsletters, our journal GESNERIADS, and original sources)

Volume 3, Number 3

March 2012



This issue includes articles by Ruth Coulson on growing large Sinningias, Jaco Truter on *Streptocarpus decipiens*, Karyn Cichocki on gesneriad propagation, photos from the Philadelphia Flower Show, and Coming Events.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings!**

Mel Grice, Editor



Sinningia defoliata (grown by Charlene Marietti) and *Primulina dryas* 'Hisako' (grown by Thomas Whitefield) were two of the award winning entries at the Philadelphia Flower Show this year. See more award winning entries on page 10 and in the next issue of **Gleanings**.



Growing Large Sinningias

Ruth Coulson <mrcoulson@iprimus.com.au>
Balcolyn, Australia

When I became interested in Sinningias, I became interested in all Sinningias, anything from miniatures to the tallest and most robust plants there are.

It was inevitable that some of the tallest and strongest would eventually be grown as garden plants. Initially I grew Sinningias outdoors in my shade house whose main purpose is to keep birds and bugs off. Soon I ran out of space so the largest and strongest went to pots and tubs around the garden. When it became obvious they didn't mind this at all, I ended up planting many directly in the soil. And so I have a new lot of plants for my garden. As a trial, I am growing many of the mid-size Sinningias in the open garden. The truly tall ones that come from open field type habitats mostly fit in really well. They need really bright light so a sunny spot is excellent.

In some cases I have dug the pots themselves into the ground. This makes them less noticeable in the garden and also prevents top-heavy plants from blowing over in the wind.

I am most fortunate in living in a mild climate to which so many Sinningias adapt very well. Most have a short period of dormancy, but that is not a problem. If they are in pots I just put the pots in the shade house during the dormant period. Importantly, concentrating on plants that thrive in the natural conditions is helping to reduce my electricity costs, too.

Sinningia species I have grown this way have included: *aggregata*, *bulbosa*, *carangolensis*, *curtiflora*, *incarnata*, *insularis*, *polyantha*, *reitzii*, *sellovii*, *sulcata*, *tubiflora* and *warmingii*. Many of these simply don't perform for me unless grown in a fair amount of sunlight. I also have hybrids involving some of these and I grow them the same way. These are some that have been the most interesting for me.

Sinningia reitzii is one I have always had to grow outdoors because of its large size. I mostly have put it in the ground in a shady spot, but have now found that it is just as happy in full sun. It stays green all the year around, flowering from mid-late summer through well into mid-winter. Its flowers provide a really welcome spot of red in that part of the garden. Its large soft green leaves fit in well with the other plants I grow, and I now have a few different forms of the plant with slightly different coloured flowers.



Sinningia reitzii

Sinningia carangolensis was a good surprise this summer. It had always been just an average plant. It has medium green leaves, grows 50 to 80 cm tall in my conditions and has narrow orange flowers and used to hold two to three only in a leaf axil. Nice enough but not exciting. This year it has really excelled itself. It has produced real bunches of flowers. I can only suppose that it has relished the wetter conditions we have had this summer. I now think it is something to treasure. All those flowers! The plant itself has become rather ragged and untidy now that flowering has just about finished, but that is probably because of the rain, and from the attentions of the birds.

Sinningia curtiflora was also a surprise to me. I liked the idea of this one. It has a tall spike with heaps of tiny orange/red flowers. What potential for hybridising it has. A potential untapped by me so far, though. At first I grew it in a large pot, but that very soon became crowded with tubers. It doesn't make one large tuber to a plant, but has chains of small tubers. I thought it would become something of a pest in the open garden since it would be so easy for it to spread. I planted it in a narrow confined bed where it couldn't do much harm. It grew well and flowered for the first couple of years, but soon proved itself to be a wimp. It just took one really scorching hot day for it to show its true colours. It burned to the ground and just never came back up. It was one of the very few plants of any sort that were dealt a fatal blow on that occasion. I did have another plant - and now I keep it in a tub in a slightly more sheltered spot. It isn't a favourite plant, but I feel challenged now, and can't let it die.

Sinningia warmingii is a plant not favoured by many growers because of its large size. I have had plants of it for many years but didn't see the best of them until I found them places in the brightest sunlight. *Sinningia warmingii* can grow really tall, but then there's nothing wrong with that in the garden. It's just a lot more showy. There are always plenty of those luscious long stems of flowers. More recently I have acquired other plants of *S. warmingii*, other collections some of which are much more compact. I haven't



Sinningia carangolensis



Sinningia warmingii



Sinningia sellovii

had as many flowers on them though.

Sinningia sellovii is one that I just didn't like for a long time. That was when I grew it in a pot with other pot plants. It flowers so heavily and produces so much seed that it was almost impossible to prevent self-sown seedlings coming up in other pots and squeezing out their former contents. Now I plant the tuber straight in the garden and the results are great. They produce stem after stem of flowers so long as the old ones are removed when they

finish flowering. They almost never go dormant in a warm spot. I have become very fond of those tall arching stems of pinkish red flowers. I really mean tall. I have had stems almost as tall as I am. In garden conditions where watering is minimal, there are almost no little seedlings so there is no danger of *S. sellovii* becoming a weed.

I haven't talked about the specifics of these plants very much. That is because almost all have the typical orange/red/dusky pink flowers, with just the occasional one in yellow or in white. All are tubular. And all have lots of nectar. I wouldn't care about the nectar but the birds around here just love it. Everything has its downside, and for me the downside of growing *Sinningias* in the garden is the fact that our nectar feeding birds are so strongly attracted. They have not evolved with such narrow tubular flowers and their beaks are not appropriate for getting the nectar. That doesn't stop them, though. They break the flowers open with their fat little heads, or perhaps drill in from the side of the flower to get the nectar. They can't hover, so they sit on the stem while doing this, their weight eventually pulling the stem down almost flat, or even breaking it off.

Last summer I thought that they only seemed to go for the orange and red flowers. But then I put a plant of *Sinningia aghensis* out in the garden and they attacked the lavender-purple flowers with great enthusiasm. I know they are less likely to destroy calyx-double hybrids, and I am trying to grow more of them. I don't know if they have less nectar, or if the double layer of petal material is too difficult for them. But what I really need is a group of *Sinningias* without nectar!

Take a look at our Facebook page — <https://www.facebook.com/gesneriads>

Streptocarpus decipiens — a miniature delight!

Jaco Truter <Jaco.Truter@fenner.com>

Isando, South Africa

The Graskop/Sabie area of South Africa's Mpumalanga Province (previously known as the Eastern Transvaal), being on the edge of the Transvaal Drakensberg escarpment, is particularly rich in *Streptocarpus* species, mainly rosulate types, although a number of unifoliate types also occur there.

One very unusual species found growing in pads of moss and humus among tiny filmy ferns at the back of rock overhangs in grassland is *Streptocarpus decipiens*. It is a really tiny plant, no taller than approximately 5cm, which appears to be intermediate between the caulescent and acaulescent types in the genus.

It carries a definite stem, bearing usually opposite leaves, and axillary inflorescences. The stem actually arises from the petiolode of a basal phyllomorph. It is not until the lower pair of leaves have reached about half their final size that the stem below then elongates and carries them upwards.

Hilliard and Burtt were deceived, because of the tiny stem, axillary inflorescences and verruculose seeds, into thinking it belonged to subgenus *Streptocarpella* (from there the species name, *decipiens* = deception). The characters that mark it as a true *Streptocarpus*, are the presence of basal leaves, a well marked abscission zone on these, the origin of the stem from the base of the petiolode, and the attenuate leaf base. Its chromosome number also confirms its position in subgenus *Streptocarpus*.

During mid-summer, the plant is covered with tiny white flowers, each bearing 5-7 red stripes on the floor of the corolla tube.

This species is quite difficult in cultivation, humidity domes seeming to give the best results. What an absolute delight in full flower.

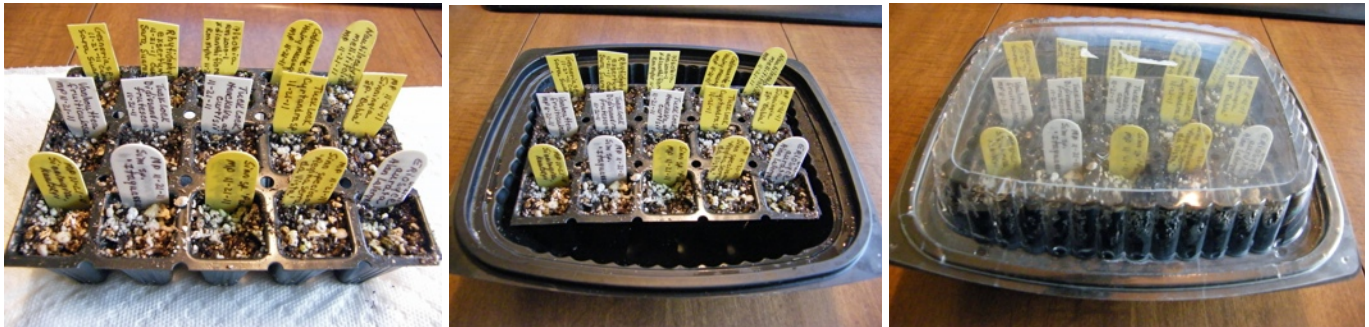


Gesneriad Propagation

Karyn Cichocki <kdc05@ptd.net>
Lafayette, New Jersey, USA

Starting from seed:

There are many containers you can use to start your seeds. I use small plug cell packs that I cut to fit into clear containers with lids. I use my regular soil mix (1 part each of peat moss, coarse perlite, and vermiculite), that has been moistened and sow a few seeds on top of the soil. You should not cover gesneriad seed with any soil. Each cell is labeled with the plant name,



Photos courtesy of Karyn Cichocki

date the seed was sown, and the source of the seed. The cell pack is then put into the clear container and the lid put on. The container is then placed under lights on a light stand. Gesneriad seed can germinate as early as one week or take up to several months, so one must be patient. You shouldn't have to water the cell packs but if you do, it is done by placing water into the container so it can be soaked up. You don't want to water from the top as this may push the seeds down into the soil.

Once the seedlings get to a size I feel comfortable to handle, they are transplanted into small pots. The pots are then watered from the bottom so the seedlings don't get damaged by a stream of water. Dale Martens suggests that you can stimulate seedling growth by gently disturbing the soil under the seedlings by using a toothpick or tweezers.

Starting from stem cuttings:

This is a fast and fairly easy method to start a plant. Cut the end of the plant, making sure that you have at least four sets of leaves. Remove the bottom two sets of leaves and then cut the end of the stem just below the last leaf node as indicated in the picture on the lower left.



Photo courtesy of
www.gesneriadsociety.org

Fill a pot up with moistened mix, either your regular soil mix or a mixture of 1 part each perlite and vermiculite. Place the cutting into the soil so the bottom two leaf nodes are below the soil line. Pinch the top leaves of the cutting out so the cutting won't continue to grow and will put its energy into sending out roots. Place the pot into a plastic bag or container with a lid making sure it doesn't build up too much moisture so the cutting rots.

Starting from leaves:

Many gesneriads can be started from a leaf similar to the method you would use to start an African violet. Cutting the stem of the

leaf so that it is about ¾" long. If the leaf is large, you can cut the tip off to stop its growth. Larger leaves can be cut so the midrib is removed or wedge-cut along the length of the leaf creating a stem with the pointed end of the midrib. Both methods are shown on the right using a *Streptocarpus* leaf. The leaf sections on either side of the midrib would be placed lengthwise into the soil with the midrib edge down. The wedge-cut pieces would go into the soil pointed side down. Place small leaves or your cut leaf section with a stem into the potting soil with the stem down about half way. You can choose to plant your leaves in a container with a lid, or use a pot with either your regular soil mix moistened or a mixture of 1 part each of moistened perlite and vermiculite. If growing in an enclosed container you want to watch for excessive moisture build up the first couple of days so the leaves don't rot. If starting the leaf in a pot, you want to be sure to keep the soil slightly moist. Plantlets will start growing from the stem and any vein that is touching the soil. When they get large enough, carefully separate them from the leaf and plant them in a pot.



Photo courtesy of www.gesneriadsociety.org

Starting from rhizomes:

You can either plant a rhizome whole or you can break it into smaller pieces depending on the size of the rhizome. Plants can also be started from the individual rhizome scale, but it takes longer to get a mature plant. Some plants, such as Gloxinias and



Photo courtesy of www.gesneriadsociety.org

Seemannias, produce aerial rhizomes. These can be planted to produce new plants. Some will even produce small plants at their tip



Photo courtesy of Carlynn Scott

as seen in the photo below. Plant the rhizomes, scales, or aerial rhizomes in your regular potting mix and cover with about 1" of slightly moistened mix. You don't want to keep the soil too wet until the plants start to grow or you may rot the rhizomes.

Starting from tubers:

You can cut your tubers to propagate new plants. You want to make sure that you have multiple "eyes" on your tuber, similar to those on a potato. The best way to determine this is to wait until the tuber is sprouting. Using a sharp knife, cut the tuber so that you have "eyes" on each piece. If the tuber has not sprouted, then you can leave the tuber overnight so the cut portion will form a callus. Then it can be planted in the moistened perlite or your regular soilless mix. If the tuber has sprouted, Dale Martens recommends that you plant the tuber pieces immediately in moistened perlite. This will prevent the sprouts from drying out.



Photo courtesy of The Violet Barn

The piece of tuber will put out roots from the older skin side not the fresh-cut side, so you want to make sure your piece has plenty of "old skin" on it. Once the roots form, then the tuber should sprout and form a new plant.



Photos courtesy of Dale Martens



This article appeared in a slightly different form in **Gesneriad Tips 'n Trivia**, Vol. 36, No. 2, March 2012, Karyn Cichocki, Editor. **Gesneriad Tips 'n Trivia** is the newsletter of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum Chapter of The Gesneriad Society.

Coming Events

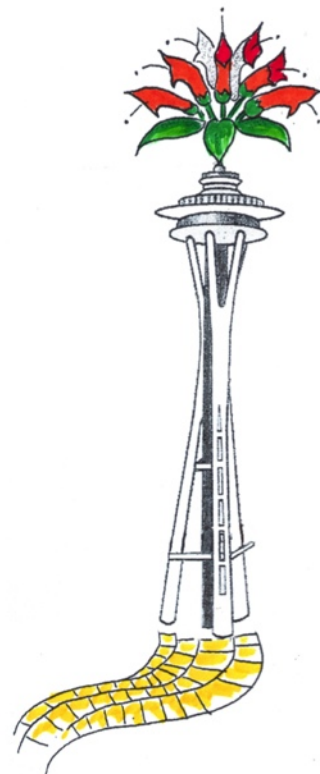
2012 Convention, Seattle, Washington

July 2 - July 7, 2012

"Gesneriads in the Emerald City"

Register today at:

<http://www.gesneriadsociety.org/conv2012/index.htm>



March 31 — Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Toronto Gesneriad Society Annual Show and Plant Sale

"GESNERIADS: KINGS AND QUEENS OF THE PLANT WORLD"

Toronto Botanical Gardens, 777 Lawrence Avenue East, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 1P2
(Lawrence Avenue East and Leslie Street, formerly known as Edward Gardens).

March 31 from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the upstairs Studios.

Admission is \$2.00 per person and parking is free.

Includes a plant sale of many rare and sought after gesneriads.

Contact: [Doris Brownlie](#).

April 14-15 — Long Island, NY
The Long Island Gesneriad Society Judged Show and Plant Sale

on the occasion of the chapter's 50th Anniversary, "GOLDEN OLDIES", in conjunction with the Saintpaulia Society of Long Island.

Planting Fields Arboretum, Conference Center, Oyster Bay, NY.

April 14, Saturday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

April 15, Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Contact: [Ben Paternoster](#).

April 21 — Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada
Lakeshore African Violet Society Annual Show and Plant Sale

"VIOLETS ROCK"

St. Philip's Lutheran Church, 61 West Deane Park Drive, Etobicoke, Ontario, M9B 2S1
(the East Mall and Rathburn Road).

April 21 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Free parking.

Some supplies will be available at the sales tables along with some unusual African violets and gesneriads.

Contact: [Beverley Williams](#).

April 28-29 — Columbus, OH
Columbus African Violet Society Annual Show and Plant Sale

"THE PRIDE OF COLUMBUS"

Franklin Park Conservatory, 1777 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH, 43203

April 28 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (sales): noon to 5:00 p.m. (show)

April 29 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Free admission and parking.

Plants, cuttings, leaves, gesneriads and other related items will be available.

Attendees will also be able to participate in educational workshops.

Contact: [Karen Jesko](#).

May 5 — Windsor, CT
Windsor African Violet Society Annual Show and Plant Sale

Grace Episcopal Church, 311 Broad Street, on the Green in Windsor, CT 06095

May 5 from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

African violets and other gesneriads will be on display. New hybrids from Lyndon Lyon Greenhouses will be for sale, as well as cut and rooted leaves. Free admission.

Contact: <http://instafax.com/wavs>



Columnea orientandina - Charlene Marietti



Primulina tamiana - variegated
Russ Strover

Philadelphia Flower Show 2012



Streptocarpus hybrid - Lynn Cook and Troy Ray



From the editor —

Judging gesneriads at the Philadelphia Flower Show with Jeanne Katzenstein and Brian Connor was lots of fun! More spring shows will soon be here. Hope to see some of you there!

Please continue sending articles. If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at editor.gleanings@gesneriadsociety.org.

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Paul Susi, Development Chairperson
117-01 Park Lane South, Apt. C1A, Kew Gardens, NY 11418
For additional information, contact: <development@gesneriadsociety.org>.

Membership and Changes of Address

The Gesneriad Society Membership Secretary, Bob Clark,
1122 East Pike Street, PMB 637, Seattle, WA 98122-3916 USA

Changes of Address — Send changes of address to the Membership Secretary <membership@gesneriadsociety.org> 90 days prior to moving to avoid missing an issue. The Society is not responsible for replacing issues missed because of late notification of address changes. Back issues may be ordered from The Gesneriad Society Publications.

Renewals — Send dues to the Membership Secretary. A Renewal Notice is sent two months prior to the expiration date of your membership. (The expiration date is printed on your mailing label/membership card on the back cover of GESNERIADS.) Please remit your dues prior to the expiration date to avoid missing an issue as we are not responsible for replacing issues missed because of late payment of dues. Back issues may be ordered from Publications.

Application for Membership — The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

WELCOME – membership in our international society includes quarterly issues of *GESNERIADS* – *The Journal for Gesneriad Growers*, a copy of *How to Know and Grow Gesneriads*, a packet of gesneriad seeds and a wealth of information about our Chapters, Flower Shows, Publications, Research, Slide Programs and Seed Fund. Membership begins upon receipt of dues.

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