

# Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from chapter newsletters, our journal *Gesneriads*, and original sources)

Volume 8, Number 4

April 2017



Welcome to the latest issue of **Gleanings**! This issue includes photos of Dennis Kramb's smithiantha seedlings, photos from the Philadelphia Flower Show, Andrew Norris' article about growing episcias, and information about the Gesneriad Society webinar downloads.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**!

**Mel Grice**, Editor



Dennis Kramb, from Liberty Township, Ohio, sent these photos of smithiantha seedlings that he grew from seeds. Read more about his experiences on the next two pages.



# 30 Smithiantha Seedlings

Dennis Kramb  
[dkramb@badbear.com](mailto:dkramb@badbear.com)  
Liberty Township, Ohio, USA

In April 2016 I bought two packets of seeds on eBay from Thad Scaggs in Florida, who is a popular hybridizer of lots of different gesneriads. I planted them right away and got my first bloom in November. I had to wait another month for the next one to bloom on Christmas day. By



Dennis Kramb photo

then there was a new seedling blooming almost every day. I took photos of each one and compiled a collage for each batch, which I labeled TS-A and TS-B. And I still have many more seedlings that have yet to bloom. I was not prepared for the diversity of colors, shapes, patterns and sizes that I got. I could not be more thrilled! There are still many more seedlings yet to bloom.

And I must mention the foliage. Smithiantha foliage is legendary! It is so fuzzy and soft and fun to touch that I would grow smithianthas even if they didn't flower. The colors of the foliage are wide ranging as well. Some are so dark red they almost appear black. Others are green,





Dennis Kramb photo

in shades from very dark to almost chartreuse, while others are combinations of multiple colors. Some smithianthas have leaves one color and the fuzzy hairs are a contrasting color, so the overall effect changes depending on your angle of view. My seedlings exhibit tremendous range of variety. The one that bloomed on Christmas Day had medium solid green leaves and stems with bright red hairs all over — perfect Christmas colors!

Normally smithianthas are winter bloomers and are dormant for the spring and summer. Therefore, it's rare to encounter them at any gesneriad shows. You can propagate them like African violets with just a leaf. With a bit of luck, it is possible to manage having a beautiful blooming plant in spring or summer. When they go dormant, you can dig through the pot and harvest the rhizomes to share with your friends. This is a great way to share plants without risking hitchhikers like thrips. If you like the look of my smithiantha flowers, google "Smithiantha" to see what full grown plants look like. They are well worth growing.



# Gesneriads at the Philadelphia Flower Show

Mel Grice  
[melsgrice@earthlink.net](mailto:melsgrice@earthlink.net)  
Englewood, Ohio, USA



*Primulina dryas* 'Hisako'  
Thomas Whitefield

Mel Grice photos



*Sinningia leucotricha*  
Leslie Anne Miller



*Kohleria* 'Snakeskin'  
Stephen Maciejewski



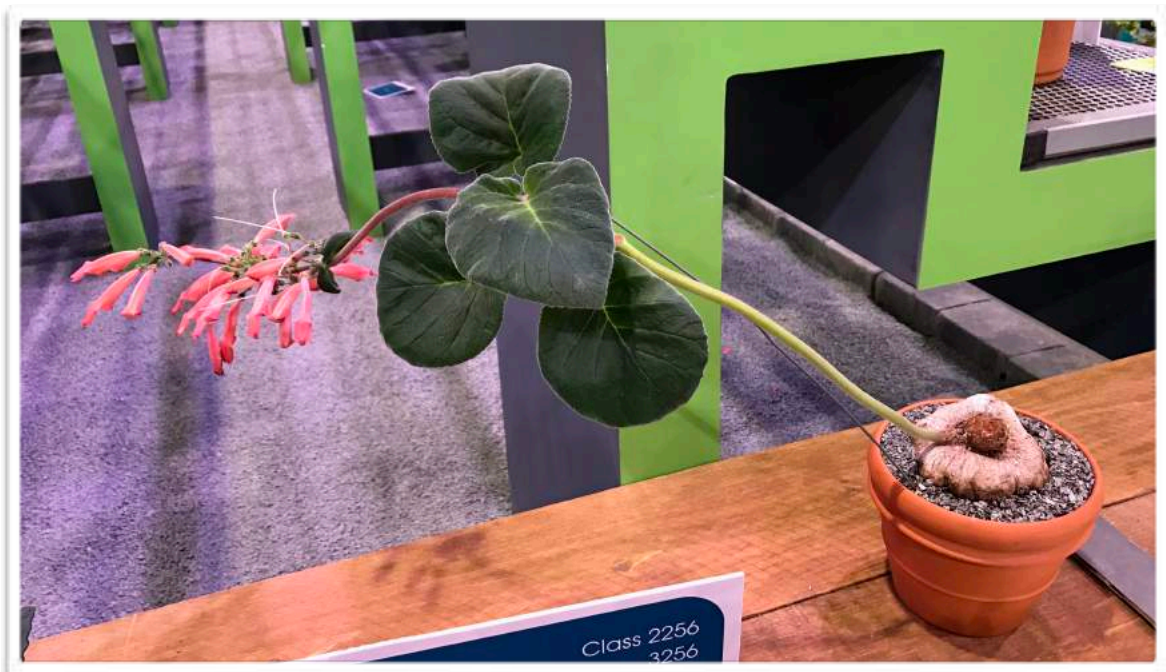
*Primulina* 'Kazu'  
Christine Jacoby





*Sinningia bulbosa*  
Stephen Maciejewski

Mel Grice photos







*Sinningia* 'Deep Purple Dreaming'  
Ken Selody

Mel Grice photos

*Primulina* 'Loki'  
Leslie Anne Miller



# Growing Episcias for Maximum Blooming

Andrew Norris  
[extensionofgreen@yahoo.com](mailto:extensionofgreen@yahoo.com)  
Marriottsville, Maryland, USA

I am no episcia expert; in fact, I only started to try growing them seriously in May of 2012. What I can offer in this article is how I grow them and what they seem to like in my growing situation. The *Episcia* 'Show Time', which I exhibited in our September show at the University of Delaware, was a mere stolon gleaned from an African Violet Club friend's show plant the previous May! Evidently episcias are fond of my methods and what I have to say will bring you great success with your episcias.

I want to cover lighting and temperature first since, to me, those two things are closely related and are the most important factors in successful growing. My plants are grown about 6-8" from one T8 40 watt 3000K bulb and one 40 watt T12 6500K bulb. My bulbs are a few years old and what I have found with T8s is that they are too intense for my plants. I was primarily an African violet grower, and used T12 tubes, which are better suited to the less light hungry plant's needs after a year or more of burn in time. I usually buy T8 bulbs in lower wattages now and don't bother with the 3000K bulbs, just sticking to two 6500K bulbs. For those wondering, a very simplified explanation of "K", relating to light bulbs, is the color temperature of the bulb in degrees Kelvin. The higher the K rating, the more blue rays are emitted, the lower the K rating, the more red. A Kelvin rating of 6,500 is your closest representation of sunlight, encompassing the colors in the proportions given off by the sun, at the equator, at noon. It is thought that red spectrums helps with flowering and blue/green spectrum is best for foliage. The same results are found by the use of one cool and one warm white bulb as using the 6,500K bulbs. Since sunlight is certainly adequate, I find the use of anything other than 6,500K bulbs to be obsolete. I still have some 3000K bulbs in use, so I mention them, since I just choose not to replace them until they are no longer adequate. Lights run between 9-12 hours, 10 in this case.

I grow my episcias on the top shelf of my stands. This is the warmest location, benefiting from the heat rising from the ballast below and the lights above them. They receive temps of about 76-78°F, with three lights running and down to 65°F, at the lowest, with the bulbs off. I run my lights at night, keeping cost down by having cooler temps during summer's daytime heat and warmer temps during winter's frosty nights. This also helps win the battle with powdery mildew, during mildew seasons.



*Episcia* 'Showtime'  
Mel Grice photo



Episcias like it warmer, but also don't resent a drop to the low 60's°F at night. I run an ultrasonic humidifier on low, just so you can barely see the output, all year round. While I don't measure the humidity, I can tell you that over 300 plants and the humidifier running means no static electricity building up!

After light and temperature, the next most important item is the soil mix. I have struggled with my wicking mix for the years I have been growing violets and gesneriads. The pH was a sneaky problem and one hard to measure, hard to understand, and hard to solve.

Many gesneriads grow on limestone, but still want a slightly acid pH, while others seem to require lime. I try every plant in the mix I will give you here, only adding a pinch of lime for *Gesneria* and Chinese terrestrials, so far with great success. My mix is a base of a 10 quart bag of Burpee eco friendly Seed Starting Mix. It is coir based, which was not something I was looking for, but also decided wasn't bad either. Since Burpee tests their products, the problems of other coir products are eliminated, with some considerations. Epsoma has a similar, suitable product, which may or may not be coir based. To this, I add 1 1/3 cup of Epsoma HollyTone, and about 60% 1/4"-1/2" perlite. HollyTone lowers the pH and provides a biologically active mix. I don't know which is working in my favor, but since switching to this formulation, my African violets are superior and my plants are better than ever before.

It has been about a year since the switch and, other than finding a less visible alternative to perlite, I am very pleased with my results. I will add that this mix tests out to a very low 5.5, but with 7.0 watering and Miracid as a fertilizer, it stabilizes quickly to around 7.0 in a short time. No plants have resented the mix so far and my testing equipment is also not the greatest, being a simple probe from a Lowes shelf. Watering and fertilizing is next on the list. Watering here is by wick, once the plants are established. My water is 7.0 in pH and I collect it from a mountain spring to avoid the additives in city water. I fertilize with Miracid ( the azalea, camellia, rhododendron formulation, by MiracleGrow is the same), at 1/16th a tsp per gallon, every watering. On occasion, I also add a few drops of Super Thrive. I wait until a newly potted plant needs its reservoir refilled (I wick on individual deli containers) before fertilizing, to allow for the fertilizers in the HollyTone and Seed Starting Mix to be used.

Finally, it's the artistry of growing show plants! Here are some tips on the grooming, potting, and shaping of the plants into a specimen that is not just well grown, but worthy of display. Most stolons should start in a 3" or 4" pot. They will quickly move up a pot size, often in a few weeks or month. While the stolon grows, I remove all marred, dying, or unattractive leaves and stolons. I continue to remove stolons until the main plant is well established. I then allow stolons to grow, allowing three at the most and removing any leaves that crowd or block light from the stolons. I place the stolons evenly inside the pot, rooting them in place and leaving them attached to the mother plant. When you no longer have room to place your stolons, or they are crowded, pot up to a 5" or 6" pan pot. I resume and keep pinching off stolons, until the pot is full of large, robust plants. I then allow a few to trail over until my sense of aesthetics is achieved. Continue removing overlapping leaves and potting up to accommodate the larger crowns, eventually into a 8"-10" pot. A maximum of 5 stolons will provide a full pot without appearing crowded and then one or two stolons from each established crown can be allowed to trail over and gain some size. Too many stolons allowed to trail or root rob the plant of energy for flowering and distract the judges.



Flowering should have begun in your 5"-6" pot and will continue indefinitely. Remove spent flowers and leaves every few days, as the blooms are short-lived and can get messy if not tended to. I will add that new plants are best started from stolons, as I have found many varieties to slow or cease stolon production at flowering size. Always have a non-flowering stolon to continue with for best results. Hope you find my methods helpful and I hope to see some bloom-covered episcias gracing our future show tables.

Reprinted from *The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Newsletter*, November 2013, Volume XVI, No. 3., Quentin Schlieder, Editor.



Part of Andrew's growing area

## Webinars

Two more webinar downloads are now available: **Petrocosmeas with Bev Williams** and **Growing Saintpaulia Species** by Dr. Jeff Smith. You can order these and other webinars in the Gesneriad Society Shop - <https://the-gesneriad-society.myshopify.com/collections/webinars>



**From the editor —**

April has been a busy month for me so far. Two shows to judge and my own local African violet club show have kept me busy. My plants need attention!

If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at [melsgrice@earthlink.net](mailto:melsgrice@earthlink.net)

Mel

Consultants	Alcie Maxwell Judy Zinni
Internet Communications	Julie Mavity-Hudson Paul Susi
Newsletter Editor	Mel Grice 2019 Crosswind Ct. Englewood, OH 45322 USA <a href="mailto:melsgrice@earthlink.net">melsgrice@earthlink.net</a>
Permission to reprint from <b>Gleanings</b> is granted, provided that credit is given to the author and the publication.	

**Donations**

The Gesneriad Society, Inc. is a tax-exempt organization with an IRS section 501 (c)(3) status for donations. You can make your donations online at [www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org). You may also send your donation (check payable to The Gesneriad Society) to:

Betsy Gottshall, Development Chairperson  
108 Godshall Road, Collegeville, PA 19426  
For additional information, contact: [gottshb@verizon.net](mailto:gottshb@verizon.net)

**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](mailto: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 received with each copy 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, programs and seed fund. Membership begins upon receipt of dues.

New Member                      Date \_\_\_\_\_

Renewal                              Membership # \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
FAMILY NAME                      GIVEN NAME                      MIDDLE INITIAL

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
STREET

\_\_\_\_\_ CITY                      STATE                      ZIP CODE                      COUNTRY

Email \_\_\_\_\_                      Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

(Rates in US\$)	Mailing in US 1 year	Mailing in US 3 years	Mailing outside US 1 year	Mailing outside US 3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	\$70	\$30	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> Household	\$26	\$73	\$31	\$88
<input type="checkbox"/> Journal Subscription <small>(organizations, chapters, affiliates)</small>	\$25	\$70	\$30	\$85
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Life	Mailing in USA \$375		Mailing outside USA \$450	
<input type="checkbox"/> Green Option	Electronic journal copy (no print copy) for Individual or Household Members \$20 (one year), \$55 (three years) anywhere in the world			

I wish to make a tax-deductible contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Elvin McDonald Research Endowment Fund     Nellie D. Sleeth Scholarship Endowment Fund

Frances Batcheller Endowment Fund     Students and Speakers Convention Fund     Conservation Fund

In Honor     Memory of \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks or money orders payable in US\$ on a USA bank to: **The Gesneriad Society**

Or, charge my  VISA, or  MasterCard

Card # \_\_\_\_\_                      Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_                      Amount \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: **The Gesneriad Society Membership Secretary, Bob Clark,**  
1122 East Pike St., PMB 637, Seattle, WA 98122-3916 USA

For application online: [www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)