



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

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

Volume 9, Number 10

October 2018



Welcome to the latest issue of **Gleanings**! This issue includes photos from the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Show, Brian Connor's article on *Streptocarpus*, and photos from the Heart of America Gesneriad Society Show.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**!

Mel Grice, Editor

×*Gloximannia* 'She's Dancing' grown by Barb Borleske and exhibited at the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Show.
(See more show photos on the following pages)

Raymond Ruger photos



Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Show

Mary Schaeffer

- Best in Show - Barb Borleske - *xGloximannia* 'She's Dancing'
- Runner up Best in Show - Barb Borleske - *Gloxinia* 'Dragonsong'
- Best in the Arts - Tom Finnigan - *Primulina* 'Patina' (Color print of parts of a gesneriad)
- Sweepstakes in Horticulture - Barb Borleske
- Sweepstakes in Arts – Elizabeth Varley
- Best Fibrous - Bobbie LaFashia - *Saintpaulia* 'Rob's Fuddy Duddy'
- Best Tuberous - Raymond Ruger - *Sinningia* 'Polka Punch'
- Best Rhizomatous - Barb Borleske - *xGloximannia* 'She's Dancing'

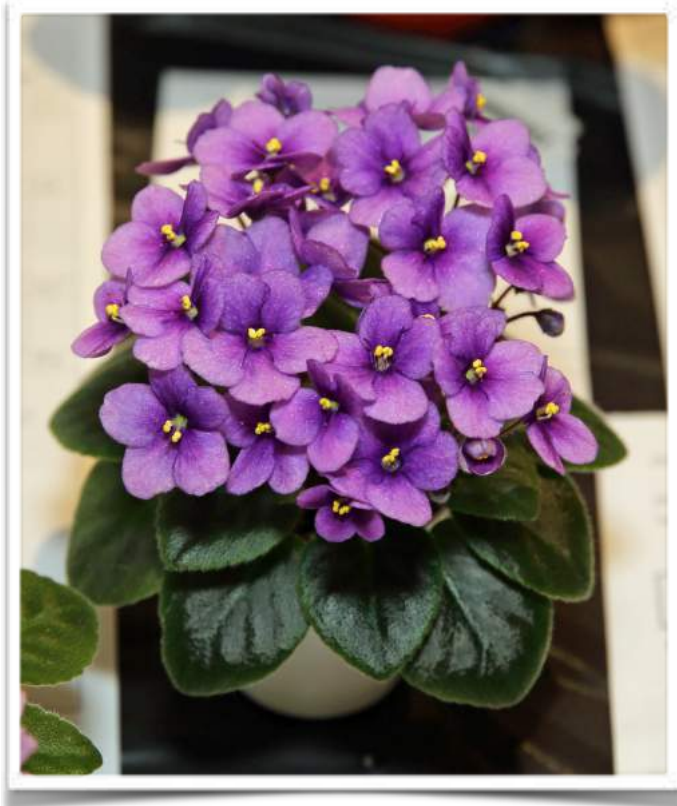
Blue Ribbon Winners

Other sinningia species or hybrids: Raymond Ruger - *Sinningia* 'Polka Punch'
Achimenes, *xAchimenantha* Section A: Barb Borleske - *Achimenes* 'Salmon Pink'
Achimenes, *xAchimenantha* Section B: Bobbie LaFashia - *Achimenes* 'Sauline'



Gloxinia
'Dragonsong'
Barb Borleske

Raymond Ruger
photo



Saintpaulia 'Rob's Fuddy Duddy'
Bobbie LaFashia



Sinningia 'Polka Punch'
Raymond Ruger

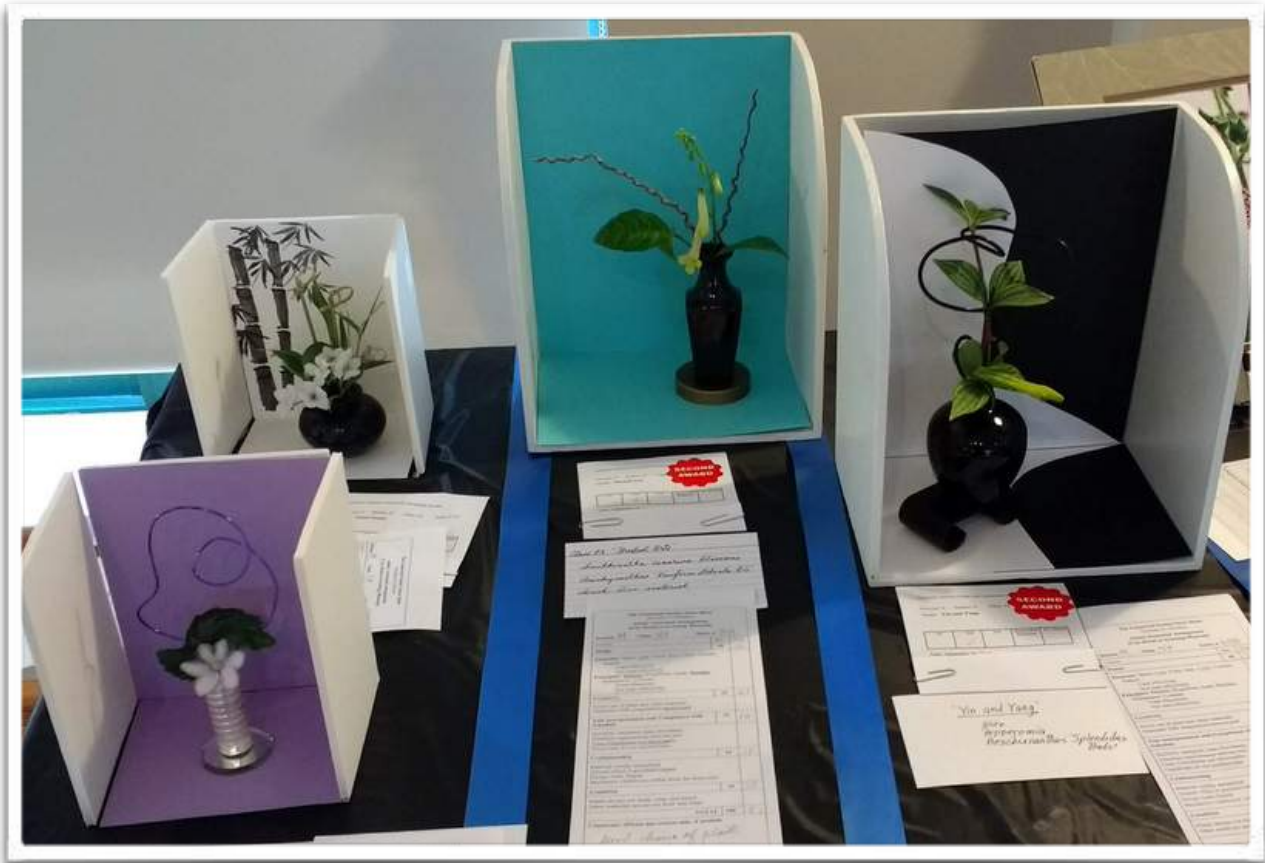


Petrocosmea flaccida
Watercolor
Elizabeth Varley



Episcia 'Moonlight Valley'
Mary Schaeffer

Raymond Ruger photos



Left top: "Giant Panda" (white background) - Terry Celano
 Left bottom: "Giant Panda" (lavender background) - Bobbie LaFashia
 Center: "Martial Arts" - Bobbie LaFashia
 Right: "Yin and Yang" - Terry Celano

Paul Susi photo



Streptocarpus 'Stonewashed' painting
 Terry Celano

Paul Susi photo



Streptocarpus bloom - counted cross stitch
 Elizabeth Varley

Raymond Ruger photo

Streptocarpus

Brian Connor

People often tell beginners to grow *Streptocarpus* or some other gesneriad "just like African violets." Well there are many similarities but there are some differences. Good bright light is essential if you want flowers. *Streptocarpus*, like African violets, can reward you with blossoms at any time. If culture is good, some hybrids will bloom much of the year under artificial light, although plants may take a break and slow down for 6-12 weeks in winter (sometimes a briefer period in summer also). Once the proper light preferences are found, most cultural problems are associated with watering.

LIGHT: *Streptocarpus* requires light similar to but better than African violets. For natural light that means an east or west window. A south window may be too strong and require sheer curtains or the plants can be placed several feet back from the window. A north window is usually not sufficient, but I once had a northeast window on the fifth floor of an apartment building where my streps thrived. Windows can vary and may be obstructed by trees or buildings, so you will have to experiment to find that happy spot for your plants. I have started supplementing natural light with a few hours of light from a single T-5 fluorescent bulb. The light is on a couple of hours before or after the window is bright with sunlight. This ensures that plants get some good light on cloudy days. Many excellent growers rely completely on artificial light. Two T-8 fluorescent bulbs that are on for 11-12 hours can grow healthy, blooming streps. T-5 fluorescent lights can also be excellent for *Streptocarpus*, although I find T-5 excessive and too strong for standard African violets. There are two simple ways to control artificial light: 1. Length of time the lights are on and 2. Distance the plants are placed from lights. I have heard of people using 3-4 tube T-8 fluorescent lights instead of two, but I have found this too much light for my streps, although it may be a good set-up for high light gesneriads like some of the sinningia species. One experienced strep grower that I know uses two T-12's and moves the plants closer to the lights and increases the time the lights are on before flower shows. Many people are experimenting successfully with LED lights, which are more environmentally friendly than fluorescent tubes. LED lights can be used as ribbon strips that are attached to shelves or retro-fit tubes that are placed in T-8 or T-5 fluorescent light fixtures. This is a topic in itself, but here is one interesting "how to" article: <http://renovatedfaith.com/2018/01/09/grow-african-violets-with-led/>.

TEMPERATURE: *Streptocarpus* prefer normal household temperatures, 65-80 degrees F. A 5-10 degree drop in temperature at night can be beneficial, but is not required. Constant temperatures above 85° F are detrimental. *Streptocarpus* can survive quite well at temperatures down to 50° F (and even lower). The plants will slow down and stop growing at temperature extremes outside their preferred range. At high or very low temperatures, please water very carefully.

WATER: Watering is where most people run into trouble with their plants. Streps like very light, even moisture but hate soggy soil and "wet feet" even more so than African violets. If you are watering by hand, let the soil surface go dry. The soil should not be bone dry before the plant drinks again. However, if in doubt, it is better to wait a day. Most of the time streps recover from a severe wilt. They will not recover from

consistent overwatering or inconsistent watering (overwatering then under watering multiple times). Paradoxically, streps lend themselves beautifully to self-watering methods with one important consideration. The soil mix **MUST** be very well aerated. If wicking, using capillary matting, Oyama pots, etc., one **MUST** use a soil mix with a very high percentage of drainage material (typically perlite).

SOIL MIX: As suggested above, the soil mix is dependent on how you water. If watering by hand, the classic 1:1:1 mix (1 part each sphagnum peat, perlite, vermiculite) is a good choice. Some people no longer use vermiculite so an easy variation would be two parts PRO-MIX or PRO-MIX HP with one part perlite. Other soil mixes, for instance coir based, can also be substituted for the PRO-MIX, if you like. Depending on pH of water and soil, some add dolomite lime to the soil. A small amount of animal manure (the odorless kind) can benefit established plants, with the organic material not more than 3-5% of the soil mix.

NOTE: A few Russian/Ukrainian hybrids do not like the addition of the organics and are referred to as Salt-Sensitive. Some growers have used good quality long fiber sphagnum moss for salt-sensitive streps. If wick watering, using self-watering pots (Oyama or ceramic) or capillary matting, I find it preferable to use a soil mix with at least 50% perlite. Here is my current "*Streptocarpus* Wicking/Oyama" soil mix: two parts PRO-MIX or milled sphagnum moss, two parts small perlite, two parts medium perlite, one part horticultural charcoal. It sounds crazy, but it is only about 30% peat or sphagnum and 70% drainage material (mostly perlite). With a soil mix this light and lean, a very dilute fertilizer must be added to the water reservoirs, at about 1/8 strength. I am currently growing mostly in Oyama pots.

FERTILIZER: Strength of fertilizer will depend on how you water and how often you wish to feed your plants. If you are hand watering, you could fertilize at every watering at 1/8 strength (some growers dilute closer to 1/4 strength). If you fertilize much less frequently, you can concentrate the fertilizer some, but not more than 1/4 to half strength. When wick watering or using Oyama pots, add dilute fertilizer at 1/8 strength to the water. This is important because the soil is very lean and the plants need a source of N, P, K as well as calcium, magnesium and trace elements. Decide on a couple of good fertilizers and rotate them. Dyna-Gro Foliage-Pro (9-3-6) is an excellent, reliable fertilizer for *Streptocarpus*. Honestly, many African violet or orchid fertilizers can be used. Better Gro Orchid Plus (20-14-13) is very good and widely available at garden centers. I have used Miracle Gro Tomato fertilizer (18-18-21) and Fox Farm Grow Big (6-4-4) in the past successfully. Algoflash Orchid (4-6-6) has been reported as a good foliar spray for seedlings/young plants. In the past 7-8 years most growers suggest it is best to avoid regular use of high phosphorous fertilizers. Over ten years ago when I first started collecting streps; I did use a 10-30-20 and then Better Gro Orchid Better-Bloom 11-35-15 on rare occasions before flower shows. My plants did not die and I did notice an increase in blooms with just one or two applications. However, older leaves became pale and yellowed. Constant use of high phosphorous fertilizers with P over 30 to bloom boost will cost you leaves eventually! If you insist on using them to prepare for a flower show, be sparing (use once or at most twice), leach the soil regularly and re-pot the plant in fresh

soil mix after the flower show. Do NOT ever use the Super Bloom Boosters with P over 50 such as 10-52-10. Reverse Osmosis (RO) water and rain water have no salts, so RO specific fertilizer should be used with these water sources. Jacks Orchid RO Water Soluble powder 12-3-15-7-2 (the 7 is calcium and the 2 is magnesium) is one example. A small minority of Russian/Ukrainian hybrids are sensitive to fertilizer salts and organics or manure-based fertilizers should be avoided within this sub-group of Russian/Ukrainian hybrids. The hybrid 'DS-Aphrodisiac' is a notorious example.

REPOTTING: Streps like being root bound. Healthy streps like to be re-potted and groomed. When grooming, remove the oldest leaf/leaves that will never bloom again to stimulate new growth. Many Streps can be grown with more than one crown, but too many crowns can deplete the strength of the plant. You may need to remove some crowns occasionally or divide and re-pot the plant. The Dimetris Group (DS) has an informative table of their hybrids that includes recommendations for the number of crowns (rosettes) for each hybrid:

<http://streptocarpus-dimetris.com/catalog-en/index.php>.

In a perfect world, most actively growing streps could be re-potted three times a year. My horticultural reality is sometimes not ideal and two times a year will suffice. Re-potting at least once a year is a necessity, otherwise the soil pH will likely go awry. My bad horticultural twin on 1-2 occasions has allowed a plant to go two years or more without re-potting. In such cases, the older leaves may start to develop yellow haloes, showing a failure to absorb nitrogen properly. So, repot those *Streptocarpus* in fresh soil mix on occasion!

PESTS: I have not had too much trouble with insects and streps, but foliar and root mealy bugs, thrips and mites are the most likely threats. I have never seen aphids, white fly or scale on *Streptocarpus*. I know aphids are possible. Treat early and isolate new or infected plants. Neem oil spray is generally a good first line of chemical defense. Foliar mealy bugs can be picked off or sprayed with insecticidal soaps or Neem if the infestation is early. I have used Imidacloprid or Marathon for soil mealy bugs, but I am trying to avoid insecticides. There is a lot of literature on how to get rid of thrips, too much to discuss in depth here. First disbud all plants (ouch!), then treat. Mites are often sprayed with Avid, but Neem is worth a try. Sometimes you may have to consider discarding an infected plant (ouch!). Neem can inhibit fungus or powdery mildew as well. Immunox or copper sprays can be used for serious fungal infection. Again, you may have to consider discarding a badly infected plant. A plant with suspected viral infection should be trashed.

NEW HYBRIDS: Many remarkable streptocarpus plants have emerged in the last 5-10 years from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and elsewhere. The new hybridizers keep coming. Some of the plants are amazing, but they are not always equally floriferous and must be evaluated. I am completely infatuated with the flashy new creations, but the old, tried and true hybrids with simpler flowers should not be neglected. By making good choices,



Streptocarpus 'DS-Aphrodisiac' - Donna Turner photo

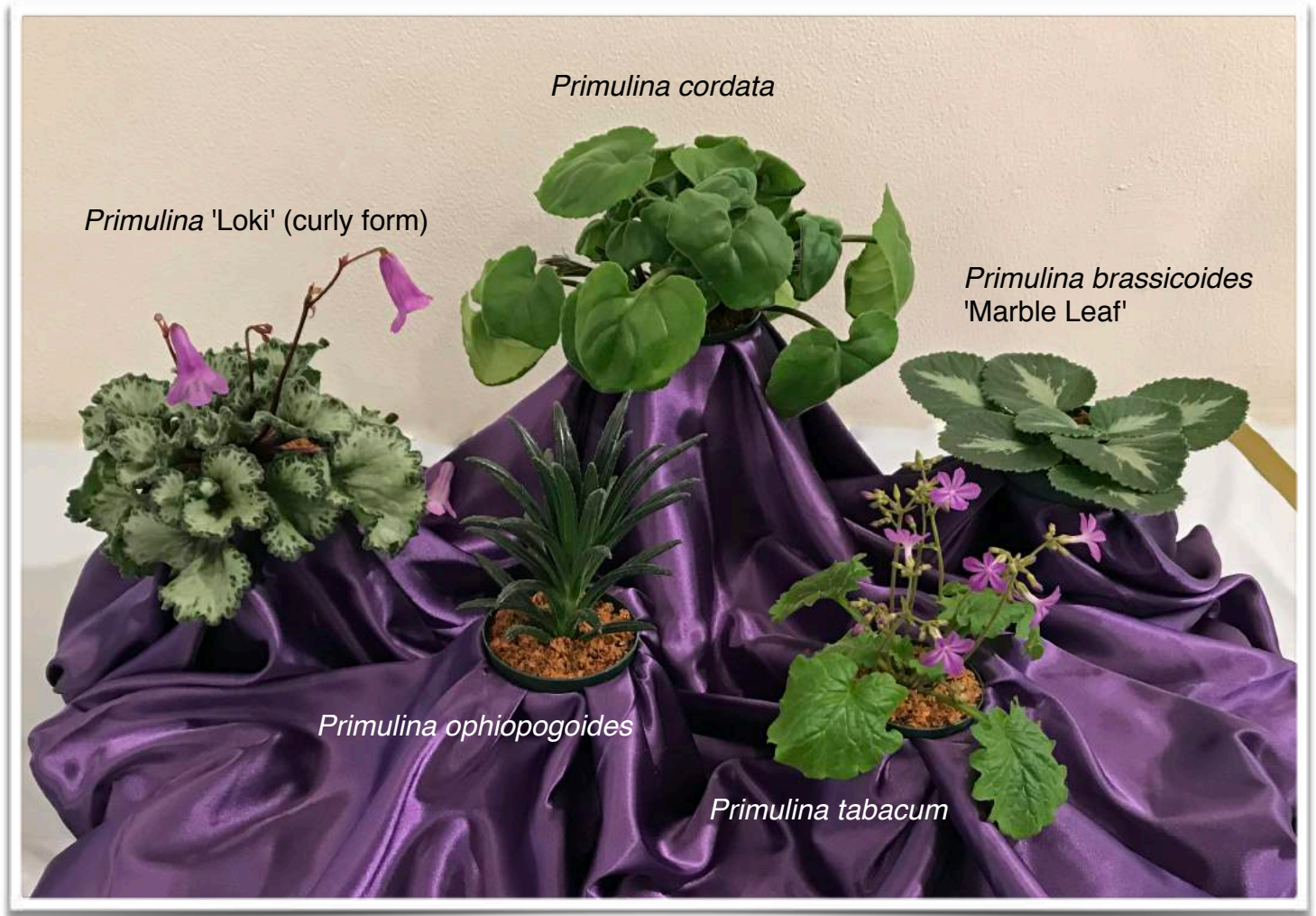
you can create a beautiful display of flowering plants with just a few steps, consisting of new and old hybrids, depending on your personal preference.

The article on the previous pages appeared in *Petal Tones*, Vol. 49, No. 9, September 2018, Donna Beverin, Editor. *Petal Tones* is the newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of The Gesneriad Society petaltones@gmail.com

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Heart of America Gesneriad Society Show Photos



Primulina collection - Linda Hall
Best in Show

Mel Grice photo



Episcia 'Aloha Mauna Loa'
Laurie Nelson

Kohleria 'Designer's Halloween'
Linda Hall



Columnea 'Fujyama'
Edna Alexander

Streptocarpus 'Bristol's Sex Kitten'
Linda Hall



Mel Grice photos



Join us in Cincinnati in 2019!

**The 63rd Annual Convention of The Gesneriad Society
July 1 to July 6, 2019**

**Hilton Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel
35 W. 5th Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202**

Plant Sales open: Friday, July 5 - 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Flower Show open: Friday, July 5 - 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Flower Show and Plant Sales open: July 6 - 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**For additional information, contact Mel Grice at
melsgrice@earthlink.net**

**Online Registration
Opens on January 1,
2019!**

www.gesneriadsociety.org





From the editor —

The fall shows are continuing. Please take photos for me at those shows that I cannot attend in person. Thanks to all those who have submitted photos!

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

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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.

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