

CROSSWORDS



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NEWSLETTER

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EDITORS NOTES



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GHA is officially an Interest Group under The Gesneriad Society. Our treasury has been transferred which was about \$3900. Therefore, GHA shouldn't ever be a drain on the Society's budget. This particular newsletter has some great information about sowing and growing gesneriads. Even if you are an experienced person, you might learn something new by reading the articles. Mel Grice, our Seed Fund Chairperson, has shared his method of keeping seedlings watered, particularly when the grower is a traveler and away for periods of time. I've used this method and it does work. Season's Greetings to our hybridizers!

Dale Martens and Linda Zillich, co-editors

THE MAGIC OF ACHIMEN-

Serge Saliba, Romania, Europe
<serge_saliba@yahoo.com>

A lot of people ask me, "Why do you focus basically on Achimenes in your hybridizing?" My answer is always this: "I like to do the tough work!!"

What I really mean by such an answer is the tremendous effort I deploy each time I create a new Achimenes series. It's really the kind of work that requires a lot of patience, experience and perseverance. In actuality it is extremely difficult to get a seed pod from a potential cross of Achimenes.

Creating new hybrids becomes a necessity to me since Achimenes is my favorite gesneriad. It is the only one which can transform an empty balcony of an apartment into a stunning garden with an immense volume of colors. Other gesneriads could be then used to fill the gap between blooming Achimenes pots. It's also a plant that can bloom up to five months weather permitting and is very easy to take care of. Plus it is almost disease-free so no cyclamen or spider mites, root rot, powdery mildew or thrips. Just give some liquid fertilizer every week and water, that's about all there is to it!!

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Achimenes 'Canicula'

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I'm very proud of the two last series that I created in 2010 and 2011. Some breakthroughs were made by filtering some outstanding genes and creating new unusual phenotypes like colored and white edges, streaks and dots on petals, unusual shapes and sizes, rare colors and some outstanding markings in the flower centers.

The most important breakthrough I made this year was the creation of a micro Achimenes with a stem of 0.5cm maximum height. I named this little hybrid Achimenes 'Nano'. It is something completely new in the Achimenes genus, one that could be grown in terrariums along with micro sinningias and micro african violets.



Achimenes 'Nana Renee'



Achimenes 'Ivory Queen'

The new series of this year is remarkable by the number of double blooming cultivars in all colors and shades. Some examples of these are: Achimenes 'Nana Renee', 'Peach Orchard', 'Limoncello', 'Veronika Gotmanova', 'Ivory Queen' and others. I always have to ask myself this question: "What is next?" My hybrids are more and more close to perfection...but my answer to what is next is very simple: "God's imagination is unlimited!!!!"

My newest project is to create some new cultivars with Kohleria-like blooms with dots on the petals and also to create some pure green colored Achimenes. In fact, I was very close to getting a pure green cultivar this year but unfortunately, for some reason, the three lower petals remained unopened and the flower did not have any esthetic value and so it was rejected, but I am still using the pollen to get rid of this genetic defect and to hopefully transfer the "green gene" to another healthy flower.

Finally before finishing my article, I want to advise all the "gesneriasts" and everyone who likes to have a small garden and who, for some reason hasn't got much outdoor space, to grow Achimenes as a principal ingredient of their indoor garden or on their balcony. Some of the newer hybrids are even resistant to extreme temperatures so that's making it even easier to build a collection suitable for any growing conditions.

Remember, Achimenes is a very easily grown gesneriad. No matter what happens, there will always be some rhizomes forming on the roots and you will never lose the plant. For better growing results, in order to get good looking Achimenes pots, expose your small plant to a high amount of light from the moment when it comes out of the rhizome until the moment when the flower buds start to form. I always

"cook" my young plants with powerful sunlight and pinch them as necessary (1, 2, 3 times) at an early stage until flower buds start to appear (so that the leaves will adapt themselves and will not burn). Then I put my pots in the wanted, protected location and enjoy the opening of the large number of blooms.



Achimenes 'Wedding Day'



Achimenes 'Last Dawn'

In closing my dear growers, I wish you all the luck and very happy growing and a very green thumb even if it's not used for growing Achimenes.

All the photos of my Achimenes can be seen on the following link:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gesneriads/>

These photos show Serge's indoor and balcony growing areas.



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Daniel Steele in Ohio

Daniel Steele <daniel-steele@att.net>

xAchimannia

I've tried for a number of years with little success to cross a 'typical' achimenes type flower with an unnamed seemannia hybrid I grew from the seed fund. I would get the occasional seed pod with some viable seed, but the seedlings were always stunted and never grew vigorously. I attempted again last year using *A. Mexicana* as the pollen parent. I did not keep records of when I made the cross (doing that from now on though!) I did manage one successful cross that yielded quite a bit of seed.

The seed was planted on April 12, 2011, and germination began on April 29. One particular plant grew very quickly and since growing space is limited in the house, was moved outside in June where all my tuberous and rhizomatous plants spend the growing season. The plant received about two hours of early morning sun and continued to grow well. The stems of the plant have a reddish coloration like seemannia and the leaves have a similar texture as well. It wasn't until the first flower bud began developing that I was more sure that it was a successful cross and not a selfing. The sepals of the seemannia parent are long and narrow. Those of *A. mexicana* taper to a point and are more 'star' shaped. The new hybrid shares the star shaped sepal pattern.



The manufacturers of one of my soil mix ingredients has either changed their formula or didn't completely sterilize the mix. Several of my rhizomatous plants experienced a disease destroying their root systems. The xAchimannia was about 8" high when it became one of the victims. I managed to root two branches where the flower did continue to develop during the rooting process. The first flower never opened fully but the second flower more than made up for it. As this plant has continued to grow, it has begun to produce aerial propagules like the seemannia parent. Instead of long and stringy though, these are rather robust and the little 'scale/leaflets' are getting larger and appear to be becoming proper stems that could be rooted for propagation. The plant had also produced several rhizomes that were reddish in color. Sadly, these exhibited signs of rot and the scales did not grow. Hopefully, with sterile soil mix and a new growth cycle, next year will show the hybrid's true potential.

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The leaves of this plant are about 3" long and 2" wide with a petiole of 1". The flowers are 1" wide, 7/8" tall, and 1-1/4" long and appear to be an intermediate blend of the parents. The flowers have a white throat with bright purplish/pink petals with many spots slightly darker in color in the throat and extending to the edge of the petals. The plant produces some pollen and I've attempted a selfing but as yet, it is too soon to tell if it was successful. The plant does appear to be seed fertile. A cross made with my xAchimenantha 'Blue Bullets' seems to have taken and a nice pod is developing!



During the process of taking the cuttings, three leaves were also put down on August 17th with hopes of getting plantlets. On September 15th, I discovered many little plantlets already poking their way up through the soil. As these continue to develop, some have gone on to look like proper plants while others resemble the aerial propagules. A little bit of probing in the pots with both plants and leaf cuttings showed pink/red rhizomes forming as well.



It's interesting to note the aerial propagules have taken on two habits. Some of the propagules have grown larger and larger leaflets until they become proper leaves and some have even bloomed. Others behaved in reverse and became smaller and smaller until they formed aerial rhizomes. The aerial propagules did not develop while the plants were growing outside but only after bringing them in as cuttings placed under lights in the cool basement.

Communications with Dale Martens and John Boggan indicate that no preselected hybrid genus name has been created for this intergeneric cross and the honor is mine. A comment in a recent G-philes thread indicated that the seed parent didn't have to be the first in creating the name and it should be relatively pronounceable. As such, I'll be calling this xAchimannia 'Ohio's Never Say Never'.

xSmithicodonia

Dale Martens

I widely distributed rhizomes of my intergeneric cross between Smithiantha 'Sassy Redhead' (seed parent) crossed with an unnamed Leong Tuck Lock Eucodonia hybrid seedling that Karyn Cichocki donated to the plant sales room during a convention some years ago. When one is trying for an intergeneric, one needs to pollinate a thousand flowers...well, at least overwhelm the plant's flowers with pollen from the foreign genus. The "keeper" from this cross has leaves similar to a smithiantha. The flower color is an intense wine-magenta. Keep in mind that Smithiantha 'Sassy Redhead' has an intense red flower and its seed parent was an orange colored *S. zebrina* hybrid. A selfing of 'Sassy Redhead' would not have produced anything near a wine or lavender color. Therefore the Eucodonia did influence the flower color in this case.



I was more than thrilled to see 'xSmithicodonia 'Heartland's Joy' entered when I attended the National Capital Area show at Behnke's Nursery in Maryland in mid-September to help judge their show. Actually, what happened was that I was asked by a panel of judges about the plant, and said I'd never seen so many flowers on it before. I could hardly wait to give a hug to whomever entered it. As it turned out, one of the clerks on my panel, Nell Reese, had entered it. The photo shows me (the sassy redhead) and Nell along with her ribbons. Thank you, Nell !!

Method To Keep Your Seedlings Hy-

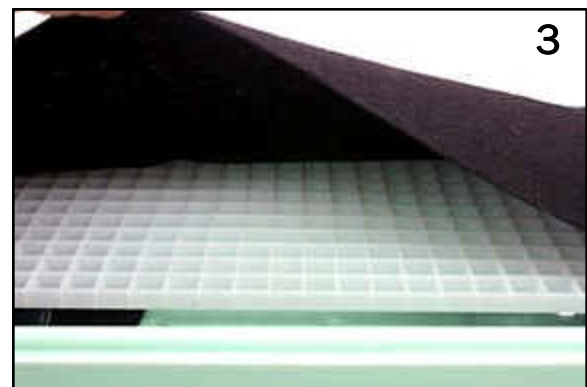
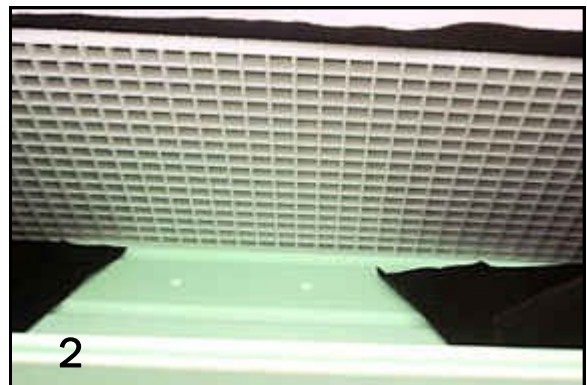
Mel Grice, Ohio, Seed Fund Chairperson for GHA

Many gesneriad seeds need light to germinate so they should just be sprinkled over the surface of a moist potting mix, do not cover them with soil. Use only half the seeds in the packet, save the rest in case something untoward happens to the first sowing. It's also easier to separate future seedlings if the pot is not full. Be sure the soil mixture is watered thoroughly before adding the seeds. Finally, find a way to keep the soil evenly moist without drying out until the seedlings are ready to be transplanted.

You don't have to do what I do, but this is what works for me: The tray holds a gallon of water. "Egg crate" lighted ceiling panels are cut to fit the top opening of the tray. Support the panel from underneath to keep it even with the tray top. Cheap felt (polyester) -- the cheapest grade you can buy so that there are lots of air spaces in it -- is placed on top of the panel with the ends wrapped around so that water is continually wicked to the pots. This seems to provide the perfect amount of moisture and air to the plants without the soil drying out.

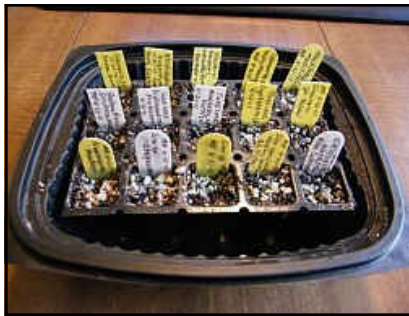
I use five ounce squatty solo cups with holes poked in the bottom and two-ply acrylic yarn for wicks. I fill the pots with my regular wicking soil and lightly cover the surface with a fine layer of fine vermiculite. I let the pots soak up water in another pan and lightly mist the tops. Then I label them on the side and sprinkle the seeds on top. The pots in photo #1 were all planted on the same day near the end of October. Four of them have still not germinated and may never germinate. One is just starting. Some are more than ready to be transplanted.

Before using this method I used to get great germination but with my travel schedule I found that I would come home and the young plants had gotten too dry while I was away. This method enables me to be reasonably sure that the seedlings will survive as long as there is water in the trays.



Gesneriphile Conversation about Seed Sowing (November,

From Karyn Cichocki in New Jersey: With this talk about seed sowing, I thought I would share with you what I have been using the past few years. I get plug trays, which are the same size as the black plastic trays you would put cell packs in. We had a local nursery, which carried a good assortment of supplies for seed starting but they've gone out of business so I get my plug trays from Harris Seed at the following internet site: <http://www.harrisseed.com/storefront/s-810-plug-trays.aspx> - I get the 144 plugs to a tray size, 5 trays for \$18.95. I can cut these up to fit the container I want to put them in. The first picture I have attached is of a section I cut to fit a deli container, there are 15 plugs.



I fill them with my regular potting soil and tap the cell packs on the table to tamp the soil down a bit. I then place the cells in a container with water to allow them to absorb the water. I usually don't water them from the top, I find that it mats the soil down too much. Once the soil is moist, I proceed to sow my seed, putting a small label into each cell with the plant name and the sowing date. I also put the name of the person I got the seed from, for example SF – seed fund. Once I have sown all my seed in the cell pack, I then place it in the container, which has a cover. In this case a deli container, but I have also used hard plastic boxes such as a sweater box. I then put the cover on the container and place it on my light stand, usually in the middle. I keep an eye on it for the first two days to make sure that I don't get a lot of moisture buildup. If I do, I leave the cover cracked for a day. I usually don't have to water the soil before I transplant the seedlings.



I want to add to my previous post about putting the seed on a paper plate. I don't sow all the seed I have even if I only have a few. I've learned from experience that something may happen to cause no germination, seedlings to die (you knocked the container off the stand while watering), or it just wasn't the right time of year to sow the seed, so I always save extra seed to try again. By putting the seed on a paper plate I can control better how much I sow (gently tap it out onto the plate), also the plate (I use a 6" size) allows me to bend it and be able to tap the seeds onto my soil spreading them out more.



I might also mention that these plug trays are great for propagating cuttings. Paul Kroll, who shows wonderful terrariums, tray landscapes and natural gardens, says that he starts his cuttings about three months prior to a show in this type of container. This method gives him plants that are just the right size for the containers he is using.

So I cut the plug tray to fit into a plastic sweater box. Fill the plugs with my potting mix or a mix of half perlite/vermiculite, moisten it and then place the cuttings, 1 per plug, into the medium. I label each plug or a section of plugs with the name of the cutting. Place the cover on the box and again check it for a couple of days for moisture build up and in a week or two you have rooted cuttings, which will start growing quite nicely. Paul, Jill Fischer and I used this method to propagate the plants we used for the tray landscape workshop we gave at the Silver Springs convention. I hope this helps – good luck.

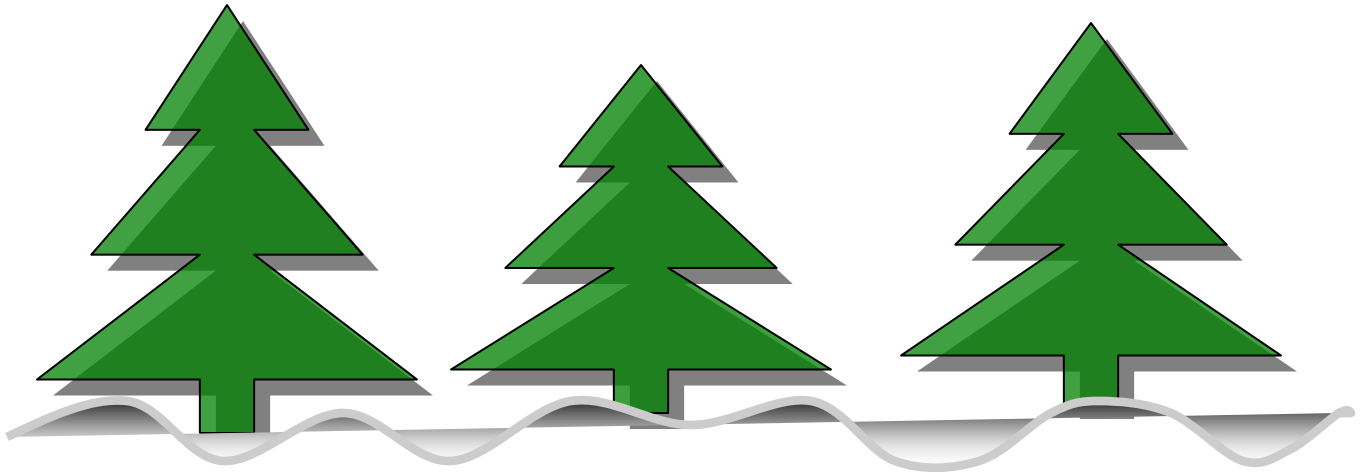
From Ruth Coulson in Australia: I have been using rather similar plug-trays for planting seedlings. I have found a problem to be that I can easily spill a seed or two into a neighbouring cell. Lately I have been just sowing in every second cell (for safety). But then, my hands may be more shaky!

I will take your advice of small paper plates. I have been using typing paper. perhaps something stiffer may work better.

Karyn responded: The smaller paper plates have a bit of coating on them and the seed roll off them easier.

From Corey in Maryland: Thank you Karyn!! I was actually talking seeds with a friend today and was thinking about asking what methods people used on them. I use 72 cell trays to start leaves and cuttings but have rarely started from seed - I can see how the 144 size would be more suited. Is there any fertilizer involved in this process after they germinate (I believe added before, it tends to just encourage fungal growth) or do you wait for that after they are transplanted to the next step? I'm so fuzzy on what to do with the tiny sizes until they get to the size I'm used to dealing when vegetatively propagating.

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I tend to use sphagnum moss a lot, and was thinking of trying the milled stuff for seed starting. I guess I feel I can control the moisture level really well with that and I'm not confident in mixing my own soilless mixes. My only other seed experience is with *S. muscicola* - and let's face it you don't have to do anything - or germinating in tissue culture.

Karyn's response: I don't use any fertilizer in the water to moisten the soil, or if I have to water seedlings. Once I transplant seedlings then I do fertilize, 1/4 tsp to gal of water with the same fertilizer I use on all my plants, Miracle-Gro Tomato Fertilizer.

I did try milled sphagnum moss that came packaged as seed starting mixture, but I didn't care for it. It kept drying out, even in an enclosed container and had more of a tendency to grow moss. I've been mixing my own soil, since I've been growing plants indoors. I just grab any handy container and use 1 part each of Pro Mix (which I have moistened and baked in an oven for 1 hr), coarse perlite & coarse vermiculite. It doesn't matter what the size of the container is. I use a plastic container that has a top to mix it all up, and I wear one of those paint masks you can get at Lowe's or Home Depot when I'm handling the perlite and during the mixing. If I'm using the soil for wick watering I add an extra container of perlite. My soil is very light.



From Thad Scaggs in Florida: I've been using some of the plastic containers we get for nearly everything now, many of them clear or at least the top clear for some kind of propagation. I found these containers, one I can sow directly into separate cells the same size as a 2 oz. soufflé cup I normally use. I split the cells with a piece of plastic stake and sow in each side. The other I move my seedlings up to is larger with lots of head room in case I get behind. I can close them both up using only 1 piece for each part of my method. This is part of going green for me.

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— POST ON YOUR FRIDGE —
FUTURE CONVENTION INFO:
 2010 (July 3—July 7)
 The Renaissance Hotel —Seattle WA, USA
 Hosted by the Puget Sound Gesneriad Society

✂

— MAKE A NOTE —

GHA is no longer paying for new hybrid registrations. There is talk of making it easy to pay for them on-line at a future date through The Gesneriad Society's web site. In the meantime, write a check for \$3 per each registration and contact Dale if you have questions.