



# *The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society*

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## ***Advice from our Prizewinners***

Libby Behnke, Nancy Murray and Bobbie LaFashia, some of the Chapter's very best growers discussed how they get their plants in tip top shape for the Chapters Annual Show at the Chapter's January meeting.

Libby Behnke demonstrated how to take a mature plant, sever the lower third of the root ball and sink it into the pot to cover the neck. She scrapes the neck of the plant to expose the cambium and dusts it with a rooting hormone to promote new roots, before adding new potting mix. She continues to use a time honored formula which includes well rotted manure. Members are encouraged to bring violet leaves for a leaf exchange. She noted that consistency in culture is critical in producing an award winning show plant. She also attributes her success to her well water which is free of chlorine and which is high in iron. Libby top waters her plants which are principally standard violets and gesneriads. Libby's favorite violet for show is 'Ming Blue.'

### **Libby Behnke's Potting Mix**

**Her husband, Wally, mixes the base comprised of:**

- 4 parts sphagnum (red) peat moss
- 3 parts Michigan (black) peat moss
- 1 part coarse charcoal
- 3 parts coarse vermiculite
- 1 part dehydrated cow manure
- 1/2 part bone meal
- 1/2 part ground limestone

**He uses a coffee can to measure out the parts (one coffee can equals one part). She uses a dishpan full of the mixture and pasteurizes it in her oven at 180 degrees for one hour (never add fertilizer prior to pasteurization). This base mix is further amended with an equal amount of the coarsest perlite she can find.**

If Bobbie LaFashia has a magic bullet, it's self control. She has a very limited growing area and confines herself to the number of plants she can accommodate comfortably. She also noted that she is ruthless...if a plant doesn't grow well for her, like *Saintpaulia* 'Pink Dove,' she discards it. If she has one nemesis it is powdery mildew. She estimated that each year she enters about a third of the plants

she is growing in the show. She concurred that consistency in culture produces the best results. Bobbie wicks her plants and specializes in miniatures and semi-miniatures. She also recommended advice from Ralph Robinson regarding timing your plants, which is printed below. Her favorite violet is 'Rob's Fuddy Duddy.'

Nancy Murray grows mainly standard varieties in Oyama pots and has achieved great results. Nancy has encountered mite problems in recent years, but using the miticide Avid, she has finally eliminated them. The active ingredient abamectin occurs naturally, and is derived from the soil micro-organism, *Streptomyces avermitilis*. Avid is labeled for control of twospotted spider mite, European red mite, carmine spider mite, Southern red mite, spruce spider mite, cyclamen mite, broad mite, and rust and bud mite. Nancy's favorite violet is 'Buckeye Cranberry Sparkler.'



*Left to right: Bobbie LaFashia, Libby Behnke and Nancy Murray.*

## ***"Fine Tuning" Show Plants***

*(Excerpts from an article by Ralph Robinson in VioletsFun)*

For most shows, his final disbudding is 9-10 weeks before the date of the show. About 6 weeks prior to the show, flower buds should begin poking through the layer of foliage above. A week later, he expects to see his first bloom, and it should have a half-dozen or so at about 3-4 weeks before the show. About one week before the show, plants should look ready to go. If it's a good variety for show, the existing blooms should last without fading and the extra time will

allow the smaller, secondary buds to open. He notes that this schedule is for plants grown in relatively cool conditions nighttime lows of 60-62f degrees and daytime highs no higher than 70f. Subtract perhaps a week from the schedule for every 3 degrees warmer. For shows much later in the spring, when growing conditions are much warmer, he subtracts a couple of weeks. If his show plants are not "on schedule", he takes corrective measures.

If plants are behind schedule, do one or more of the following things. First, increase the temperature. He prefers to grow his show plants as cool as possible, since this improves the bloom color and size. However, if plants seem to be blooming slowly, he increases the temperature, but not to higher than 80° F., daytime. At this temperature, you will get plenty of bloom very quickly, but it won't stay fresh very long. Without touching your home's thermostat, one easy way of adding 5° or so is by simply moving plants to a higher shelf on your light stand - from the floor, and closer to the ceiling. Also, have in mind which places in the room are the warmest and coolest, and place plants accordingly.

A second adjustment is in light intensity and length. Increase the amount of light your plants are getting by moving them closer to the light, particularly the centers of the tubes, where lights are the brightest. One easy way of doing this is to place plants on empty, inverted pots or similar items. He has used tin cans for this purpose - soup cans, sauce cans, etc. A variety of different heights can be collected.

You might also increase the hours of light the plants are getting. Normally, his plants get 13 hours of light daily. As the show approaches, if plants are behind schedule, this can be increased to 14 hours. If you're desperate, you can place show plants as close as 3-4" from the lights and keep them on for up to 16 hours a day. Do this with great caution, and only as needed, though. Never place plants this close to the end of the light fixtures, since the heat is too great there. Also be careful when doing this with varieties having light green foliage, fragile (or single) blooms, or white blooms. It is always best, too, to make changes as gradually as possible. Keeping a close eye on their progress as the show approaches helps you in avoiding last minute, drastic measures.

A third adjustment is in humidity. Plants will bloom more quickly, and blooms will last longer, in a relatively humid (but not soggy) environment. Though he waters show plants from the top, pots rest on "egg-crating" laid over the shelves. He can fill

trays below plants with water to increase humidity in the desired area. For those growers using capillary matting or community-wicked trays, this isn't necessary - it's more than likely that your humidity is already high enough. This is the least likely adjustment that he will make, since it seems to have the least effect, and like the others, can present its own problems.

Finally, you may want to change the formula and strength of the fertilizer being used, though this can be risky and really isn't necessary if the culture is generally good. He typically uses a balanced (17-17-17, for example) formula all of the time, right until the day of the show. This type of formula encourages dark foliage without sacrificing much in bloom. He has never found it necessary to use high phosphorus, bloom-boosting fertilizers in order to get massive amounts of bloom on show plants. Good culture and proper disbudding seems to be enough. Many growers, however, will switch to a fertilizer higher in phosphorus (the middle number) after the final disbudding, to encourage additional bloom. The amount of fertilizer might also be increased. This should be done with extreme caution, though, since he has known more than one exhibitor to damage a show plant by over fertilization. Also be careful in using "bloom boosting" fertilizers excessively high in phosphorous, or lacking in nitrogen (the first number), since this can cause foliage to turn pale, or lose color. This is true even for variegated varieties - variegation depends much more on temperature than it does on nitrogen content of fertilizers.

For plants that seem to be peaking too early, just take the opposite measures. Lower temperature and light to slow down growth and blooming. Plants on his A VSA display table were kept in a dark closet for a week before show! They were in full bloom well before the show, and it was the only way to get them to stop growing.

Monitor your show plants closely, and make the necessary adjustments. Plants need to be moved on an almost weekly basis, even a daily basis the week before the show. Keep a record of what adjustments you make and whether they worked. Next year, you'll be able to learn from your success or failure.

## ***Welcome New Members!***

We would like to welcome Bill Dillon of Wilmington, DE and Stephanie and Mark McGrath of Philadelphia, PA as new members to the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society!

## Show Prize Sponsors Needed

Anne Petrucci is collecting money for show awards. She will accept cash, but if you would like to pay by check, please make it payable to Anne. If you can't make the meeting, you can contact Anne at (302) 652-8839.

## January Show and Tell

The members' show and tell session at the January 8, 2013 meeting included a nice selection of plants.

Gary Hunter noted that his *Sinningia insularis* produces abundant clusters of orange-red flowers above small dark green foliage. It's easy to grow, makes a large tuber, and flowers year after year.



Gary Hunter discusses his plant of *Sinningia insularis*

*Sinningia* 'Little Georgie' is a prolific and constant bloomer according to Gary. Since 'Li'l Georgie' holds its flowers tight, it will be possible to have many flowers open at once, it never goes dormant and in a north window has never stopped flowering. His plant of *Sinningia* 'Gabriel's Horn' also blooms continually. Its flower is an example of what is called 'double calyx' or 'hose in hose'.

Gary's final *Sinningia* was a beautiful specimen of 'HYC's Lady Lady' a relatively new hybrid from Taiwan.

Gary noted that a story he wrote about improving *Codonanthe devosiana* for the *Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Newsletter*, was subsequently published in The Gesneriad Society's e-newsletter *Gleanings* was ultimately republished in *newPlantsandFlowers* in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Gary mentioned that one of the great features of x *Achimenantha* is that they are winter bloomers, complimenting the summer bloom of *Achimenes* which are dormant for most of the winter. This brilliant red hybrid of *Achimenes* and *Smithiantha* which was hybridized by Patrick Worley is a favorite of many, for its fiery red flowers with a yellow throat and its strong growth habit.

Mary Schaeffer also showed an x *Achimenantha* which she noted had been in bloom since October. The cultivar was x *Achimenantha* 'Northwoods Sunburst.' She grew it under 3 T-8 and suspected that it has stayed small because she planted only part of the rhizome she received and used the rest to shell and start small plants. It has great foliage and some of the flowers have a hood or horn.

Maria Walueff brought a nicely grown specimen of *Primulina* (*Chirita*) USBRG 98-083.

Libby Behnke brought in a plant of *Primulina* (*Chirita*) 'Vertigo' with nice bloom. However, the plant had suffered considerable leaf damage over the summer.

Finally, Bobbie LaFashia exhibited a beautifully grown tray of mixed Gesneriad seedlings she germinated from the complimentary packet of seed.

Thank you to all the members who shared their plants at the January Show and Tell presentation.

## Schedule for Growing Prize-Winning African Violets

Spring Show March 23, 2013 - Based on *How to Grow Prize Winning African Violets* by Pauline Bartholomew

Below is the continuation from last month of the schedule to grow award winning African Violets for the March 23<sup>rd</sup> Show:

### 6 weeks: (February 9, 2013)

Disbud singles for the last time. Check for suckers. Wash foliage.

### 1 week: (March 16, 2013)

Remove spent blossoms, peduncles, and pedicel stubs. Check for suckers. Brush away soil particles, etc. Pot down necks or pot up only if necessary.

### 1 day: (March 22, 2013)

Again remove spent blossoms, etc. Remove leaf support rings. Place plants in transporting boxes so that the foliage is supported and plants are protected from weather.



## ***Upcoming DAVS Meetings...***

**Tuesday, February 12, 2013 – 7:30 p.m.**

**Rockland Place, 1519 Rockland Rd, Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Hosts:** Snacks - Terry and Angie Celano and Anne Petrucci

Beverages – Kathe Worrell

**Program:** “A Gesneriad for Every Growing Condition” - Do you have less than ideal growing conditions in part of your growing area – too hot, too cold, too much light, not enough light, and not enough humidity? Our resident expert, Quentin Schlieder will suggest plants to grow successfully for each situation. The sales table will have some plants available discussed during the lecture.

**Tuesday, March 12, 2013 – 7:30 p.m.**

**Rockland Place, 1519 Rockland Rd, Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Hosts:** Snacks - Geno Iubatti

Beverages – Carol Callaghan

**Program:** “Design Tips from One of Our Winning Members”. Our own Terry Celano will review of the basics of design and offer suggestions for current year’s show. Each member is encouraged to bring one plant for a plant exchange. We’ll draw names to see who selects first.

**Tuesday, April 9, 2013 7:30 p.m.**

**Rockland Place, 1519 Rockland Rd, Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Hosts:** Snacks - Stacey Tomaszewski

Beverages – Dilly Schwartz

**Program:** “Container Gardening Insights” - Two award winning designers, Jill Fisher and Karyn Cichocki, will share their considerable expertise on putting together both gardens in natural containers and in trays. Bring cuttings of some of their favorite gesneriads for a cutting exchange.

## ***The Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Newsletter***

c/o Quentin Schlieder, Editor  
36 South Main Street  
Smyrna, DE 19977-1431

## ***Upcoming Shows and Sales...***

**Friday, March 22 & Saturday, March 23, 2013**

The DAVS 2013 Annual Show and Sale with the theme “Golden Jubilee – DAVS Celebrates 50 Years” will be held at Boscov’s Christiana Town Center, Delaware Route 273 in Christiana, Delaware. The Plant Sale will be open on Friday from 1-5 p.m. and on Saturday from 10a.m. – 4 p.m. The Show will be open on Saturday from 10a.m. – 4 p.m.

**April 12, 13 & 14, 2013**

The Richmond African Violet Society Show and Sale Will be held at The Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, 1800 Lakeside Avenue, Richmond, VA 23228. The Show is open on Saturday April 13, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday April 14, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. The Sale is open on Friday April 12, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.; Saturday April 13, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday April 14, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. For more information contact Sandra Moses at [mosessandra@gmail.com](mailto:mosessandra@gmail.com).

**April 13th-14th, 2013**

The Long Island Gesneriad Society judged show and plant sale, “Going Green”, in conjunction with the Saintpaulia Society of Long Island, at Planting Fields Arboretum, Conference Center, Oyster Bay. Saturday, April 13, 1:00 to 4:00 pm; Sunday, April 14, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information, contact Ben Paternoster at [ben9@optonline.net](mailto:ben9@optonline.net).

**Hold these dates! More information to follow!**

**April 19-21, 2013** - African Violet Society of Springfield (Delaware County) Show and Sale

**May 10 and 11, 2013** – Baltimore African Violet Society Show and Sale

**May 18, 2013** - African Violet Club of Burlington County Show and Sale

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