



The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society

Volume XIII, No. 8

April 2011

Final Days to Show and Sale

The Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society's Annual Show and Sale, "*African Violets Salute the Oscars*" will be held in the second floor Auditorium at the Christiana Town Center Boscov's conveniently located off Interstate 95 and Delaware Route 1 in Christiana, Delaware. Here are some important dates and times to remember:

Tuesday, April 12 - submit pre-entry forms to Carol Callaghan if you can. List all potential entries on the sheets which were enclosed with the March newsletter. Carol points out that it is easier to modify or delete items than it is to enter new ones. If you are entering designs, please let Bobbie LaFashia know at the meeting.

Important Dates & Times to Remember

Friday, April 15 – Set Up

10:00 a.m. - Arrive for set up of show and plant sale. Plants may be purchased only after pricing has been completed!

10:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. – Entries -Please have your plants groomed and named before you get to Boscov's

Saturday, April 16 – Arrangements, Late Entries, Show is Judged and Opens to Public

7:00 a.m. – Members can enter Boscov's - you must enter through the back loading entrance and sign in. Old timers know this drill pretty well!

7:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. – Late Entries only by prior arrangement and approval by Carol Callaghan

9:30 a.m. – Judges arrive get instructions and enjoy refreshments

10:00 a.m. to Noon – Judging commences

Noon – Lunch for judges at Bertucci's

1:00 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. – Judging (continues if necessary/special awards)

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. – Show & Plant Sale open to public. The Show and Sale close at 4:00 p.m. and there are **NO** Sunday hours this year!

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. - Cleanup.

Hopefully members have been propagating plants for the sale. There will be a discussion on the commission paid to members who provide plants for the sale. Remember to packaged cuttings, tubers and rhizomes too!

Finally, Anne Petrucci is collecting money for show awards at the April meeting. 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.

March 8th Meeting in Springfield Enjoyed by All!

The members who attended the March 8th meeting hosted by the African Violet Society of Springfield enjoyed the club's gracious hospitality and a great presentation by Dr. Ralph Robinson, known popularly as "Rob," who has been growing and exhibiting African violets since 1975. Accompanied by his wife, Olive Ma, he was invited to speak on his cultivation of Streptocarpus and miniature African violets. In addition to the lecture he brought a nice assortment of plants to sell.



Chirita 'Periwinkle' has Large, lavender blooms with dark orange-yellow upper throat, with dark yellow veining on lighter lavender lower throat and Pointed, serrated, quilted leaves. This easy grower and bloomer was one of the plants that Mary Schaeffer purchased to share! (Photo from The Violet Barn)

Formerly a college professor, Robinson bred, grew, and sold African violets part-time while teaching. He gave up teaching to grow and sell violets and related plants full-time in 1991. He also is a former Senior Judge, past president of New York State AV Judges Council and Columnist for *African Violet Magazine*.

He emphasized providing adequate growing space for miniature African Violets. He noted, that when the plants are crowded together. The petioles get long and weak. Violets are smarter than we give them credit for. With a limited amount of light and space, the plant that survives best is the plant that can reach above the competing foliage and be closest to the light. Plants with adequate space do not need foliage that stretches to receive better light (and air) than its neighbors. Petioles will be shorter and, to a lesser extent, leaf blades will be smaller. It took him more than a few years to discipline himself, but he has learned that it is best not to grow more plants than he can grow well. Just because more minis can be fit onto a shelf does not mean that they tolerate overcrowding any better than larger varieties. In fact, the rule here is, more growing space means smaller growing minis.

Pruning is another time-consuming task that most do not do as regularly as they should. Even though the plant is smaller, a miniature can grow as fast as or faster than a standard variety. Over a given period of time, he has observed that many miniature varieties produce more leaves than do typical standard-size varieties). Unlike a standard, however, foliage diameter is restricted. The consequence is that miniatures require more pruning of older, excess, foliage. Good pruning means more than just removing the odd yellowed leaf. His rule of thumb is: the less the better and, when in doubt, take it off. The objective is to keep minis small and, all else equal, less foliage means smaller plants. Not only is the quantity of foliage being regulated but, to a lesser extent, so is the growth habit of the foliage.

Regular repotting is also part of his approach to control the plant's size. Like all living things, violets are wonderfully adaptive. Give them a chance to grow large, and some will. Refuse them a chance to grow this way, and they learn to grow smaller.

He recommended using a peat-based, "soil-less" mix, consisting of at least 30-50% vermiculite and/or perlite. He noted that "Violet" soils are not necessarily good for violets! Go by the ingredients, not the name of the product! A bag of good soil should feel like a nice, fluffy, soft, pillow. Add more perlite to soil the wetter you plant on keeping the plant. He emphasized that if you are wick-watering, using "violet pots", or other self-watering method, you must use a mix containing at least 50% perlite!

His procedure for that semimini variety that wants to grow a bit beyond 8" in diameter is to strip off all but

the four center leaves. Next, remove about two-thirds of the root ball and repot it into a 2 1/4" or 1 1/2" pot. If it begins growing as it did before, repeat the process. Continue until the plant grows to an acceptable size. Usually, sooner or later, it will. The bigger the plant tends to grow, the more severe the pruning and more frequent the repotting.

By constantly pruning and regular repotting, the plant is not only reduced in size by "stripping it down", to a bare minimum of foliage, but eventually, the leaf size itself becomes smaller, sometimes substantially so.

An attractive, small, well-grown miniature often looks that way not because it wants to, but because the grower has "trained" it to. Growing beautiful violets is not a passive activity where the plants are allowed to grow well, but made to grow well. The grower needs to be in control of the plant's growing habits. Smaller is better!



Rob's Fuddy Duddy is a wonderful Robinson hybrid which won Best in Show at our 2010 Annual Show.

He discussed potting of his plants and noted that he encourages growers to firm the soil around the plants. He also encouraged growers to set the plants as deep as possible to enhance their stability in the pot, to encourage more roots and to minimize the neck.

We were all intrigued by his adept use of tweezers to reset a plant. He often will set a show plant deeper in the pot using only tweezers, thus eliminating potting mix on the leaves and reducing the need for grooming. We will attempt to demonstrate his technique (successfully we hope!) at the April meeting for members who could not attend his presentation. Tweezers will be available for purchase at our April meeting.

Robinson noted that 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 hasn't 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.

Robinson went on to discuss *Streptocarpus*, commonly known as the Cape primrose or "strops." He noted that in his successful breeding program which resulted in the popular "Bristol" series, he was seeking smaller plants with "sticktight" flowers displayed on stems which are not longer than the height of the plastic sleeve he uses for sales.

To propagate these, he cuts a length of leaf, and then removes the center vein (or rib). He places the two re-remaining halves, or sides of the leaf, center (or vein) side down into the rooting mix. It will look just like "two slices of bread in a toaster". Younger, more heavily veined leaves will produce more plantlets. Unlike violet plantlets, which produce pairs of leaves, each leaf that appears from a rooted strep cutting is a plant--you needn't wait for pairs of leaves to appear. Plant each of these into its own 2" pot.

The plantlet will produce its first bloom in 1-3 months, depending upon variety and conditions. At this point in time, he pots the plant into a 3" pot, where it should continue to grow and bloom. Unless it is a small, or compact, growing variety, most streps will then need repotting into a 5" pot in another 6-10 weeks. Shallow (azalea) pots are best. Except for the largest growing varieties or those grown large or for exhibition, this is the largest pot necessary. About every 5-6 months, he repots the plant, dividing it if needed, removing some of the old soil and root ball, and adding fresh soil.

He noted that generally speaking, streps are harder to kill than are violets, being more tolerant of neglect. This is especially true of the better modern hybrids. He noted that overwatering and/or too dense a soil mix is really the only way to kill most modern *Streptocarpus* hybrids, and is the most common problem of novice growers. Strops almost always will recover from lack of water, even when almost totally limp, but can be killed by continual overwatering. For this same reason, a lighter soil mix is always preferred over a heavy one.

We want to thank the Springfield club for the opportunity to enjoy a really great evening!

Election of 2011-12 Officers Set at April Meeting

The following Slate of Officers for 2011-12 is proposed by the Nominating Committee for election at the April meeting:

- President Gary Hunter
- Vice President Mary Schaefer
- Secretary Terry Celano
- Treasurer Carol Callaghan

Nominations also can be offered from the floor. The installation of officers will be held at the June meeting.

Assistance Solicited for AVSA Convention in Cherry Hill

More individuals than ever before are needed to host the showroom floor at AVSA National Convention in Cherry Hill, NJ! The show will be open to the public for two full days and the public will be paying an admission fee. Hosts and Hostesses are needed to greet our guests as they enter the room, to verify that they have paid admission and to encourage them to ask questions and to invite them to join AVSA. These are important jobs and just think how many people you would meet and talk to them about violets.

If any of you are planning to attend the convention and are willing to serve for a one-hour shift or more please contact Dot Anderson, 771 Bayberry Drive, Breinigsville, PA 18031 by phone at (610) 530-1723 or email aclwens@ptd.net.

Another request was received from Laurel W. Brown, Hospitality Chairperson for the convention, requesting donations of prepackaged snacks, beverage supplies, fruit, etc. for the Hospitality Room which provides space where convention guests can meet, relax and have a snack. Carol Callaghan has volunteered to coordinate this effort. We will discuss this request further at our meeting.

Bylaws Update

The Bylaws Committee which includes Libby Behnke, Bobbie LaFashia and Quentin Schlieder have completed the final draft which will be inserted in next month's newsletter. The revisions will be discussed at the May meeting and hopefully will be voted on at the June Picnic. Additions were made to reflect requirements of the IRS and our parent organizations, as well as to more efficiently conduct the business of the Club.

Upcoming DAVS Meetings...

Tuesday, April 12, 2011 – 7:30 p.m.

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

Hostesses: Beverages – Nancy Murray
Snacks – Grace Prophet

Program: “Getting Ready for Show” - This will be the last meeting prior to the Society’s Annual Show and Sale at Boscov’s on April 15-17, 2011. Committee Chairmen will be asked to report the status of their Committee. A plant sale will conclude the evening. If you have surplus plants which can be used for designs, please bring them. An abbreviated version of our scheduled March 8th program and workshop on mini and micromini violets will be conducted at our April meeting.

Tuesday, May 10, 2011 – 7:00 p.m.

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

Hostesses: Beverages – Angie Celano
Snacks – Terry Celano

Program: “Epiphytes in the Concrete Jungle” - You won’t want to miss this wonderful tour of Michael Riley’s New York Apartment where “living room” has a whole new meaning! Michael is a past President of the American Gloxinia and Gesneriad Society and currently is Chairman of the Manhattan Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. A plant sale will conclude the evening. If you have surplus plants to share bring them. Don’t forget to bring plants for the Little Show or Show and Tell!

Upcoming Shows and Sales...

Friday, April 15 and Saturday, April 16, 2011

The Delaware African Violet Society and Gesneriad Society will present “**African Violets Celebrate the Oscars**,” “the Society’s Annual judged Show and Sale. *It is time to begin propagating plants for the sale and selecting the plants you plan to grow on for entries in the show!*” Member grown plants are usually more profitable than plants purchased for resale, however, the Society also is looking for other sources for sales plants which can be purchased at or below wholesale cost. If you have any suggestions, please talk to Gary Hunter or Mary Schaeffer, Plant Sales Co-Chairmen. Please reserve the dates now and plan to participate!

Fri. May 6, 2011 - Sale 9am-5pm; Show 1pm-5pm

Sat. May 7th Show & Sale 9am-5pm

The Baltimore African Violet Club presents its Annual African Violet Show and Sale at The Shops at Kenilworth, 800 Kenilworth Drive, Towson, MD. The show will be on the upper level and the sale will be on the lower level of the mall. And will have many beautiful show plants as well as hundreds of beautiful African violets and other exotic houseplants, leaves, cuttings, and many growing supplies including soil mix, plant rings, self-watering pots and more for sale. Free admission. For additional information contact Shirley Huffman at bshuffman2@aol.com.

Friday, May 20, 2011 - Trip to the AVSA Convention in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Sign up at April and May meetings. Convention runs from May 15 - May 22, 2011 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Philadelphia/Cherry Hill, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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First Class Mail

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