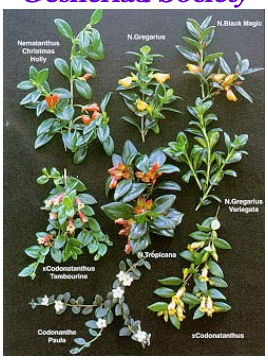

# The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society

**Volume XIII, No. 1** **September 2010**


## The Yearbook's New Look

*The Delaware African Violet & Gesneriad Society*




*2010-2011 Yearbook*

***http://gesneriadsociety.org/chapters/DAVS/***

The Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society's 2010-2011 Yearbook will be distributed to members at the September 14, 2010 meeting. It will be mailed to members in good standing who don't attend the meeting.

The yearbook has a new format. This year the yearbook will be pocket sized. Let us know what you think of the new look (actually a recycling of some older versions of the yearbook!).

## A Solution for Terrariums

In a July 26 post from Paul Kroll, he wrote about a great solution for dirty glass terrariums. He noted that Olive Ma Robinson recommended using POLIDENT ™ tablets to clean glass terrariums. He exclaimed it works! He noted he has used distilled vinegar, toilet bowl cleaner, etc. with not such remarkable results. He had a terrarium put together for his local show in March and just took it apart a day before the post. After rinsing it out, he filled the terrarium with hot water and dropped in two Polident™ tablets. The morning of the post he observed it was sparkling clean!

This has wonderful ramifications for those who are designers and creators of container gardens, but also for those who grow plants requiring high humidity (terrarium) conditions like *Gasteranthus, Nautilocalyx pemphidius, Gesneria*, some *Episcia*, etc.

He noted that he was enthusiastic about sharing the information since it worked so well for him. Polident™ is not a product he uses or keeps in the house, but it is relatively inexpensive and, if it does this job well, then.... go figure!

## Indoor Gardening from the Ground Up – Potting Media and Fertilizers."

***Our September 14th program will focus on potting media and fertilizers. The National Capital Chapter solicited favorite potting media from members and many accomplished growers. The results were printed in their May 2009 newsletter, "Petal Tones," and are in part, shared here with permission form their past and current editors. Others have been added.***

**Karyn Cichocki:**

In the past I used regular ProMix mixed with equal parts of course perlite and vermiculite. My plants grew without any problems. Then I heard a lot about the New Zealand Sphagnum Moss disks which you add water to, to reconstitute them. I added equal parts of this to my normal soil mix – so then the mix contained 1 part each of ProMix, New Zealand Sphagnum Moss, Perlite and Vermiculite. I found that in my conditions this soil mix dried out too fast and was not easy to get dampened again. As far as how the plants looked, some plants were happy in it and others (*Chirita*, *Streptocarpus*) didn't look as happy growing in it. This may also have had something to do with the drying out.

I then heard about using Coir in your soil mix, so I purchased a couple of bricks of the stuff. This added some heaviness to the soil mix, but I was really happy with the results.

For the past year I have been using the following equal parts of:
- Farland Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss
- Coarse Perlite
- Vermiculite and
- Moo Doo (dehydrated composted cow manure).

This is a light mix, which my plants are really doing well in. So far I haven't found anything that doesn't like this mix. I grow *Achimenes*, *Gloxinia* and *Eucodonia* in Oyama self watering pots and this mix does well with this form of wick watering and I haven't needed to add more vermiculite and perlite to it.

My water pH is at 7 and I find that using Miracle Gro Tomato fertilizer (1/4 tsp to gal water) helps to bring the pH to neutral. After many years of struggling

with my plants when I moved to New Jersey from Long Island, they are really looking good now.

**Lee Stradley (Creator of the Fernwood series of compact *Streptocarpus*):**

- 1 part pro mix BX
- 1 part perlite,
- 1 part charcoal
- for Chirita's I add some dolomitic lime

**Brian Connor:**

Here is a recipe for soil wicking mix that I quite liked. I deviated from it, and am going to try it again;

- 1 part hydrated brick of coco coir (approx. 8 quarts of coir after hydration---- while hydrating the brick add
- 3/8 teaspoon of Superthrive™ to the water)
- 8 quarts coarse perlite
- 8 quarts small grade diatomite (#2)
- 1 1/2 quarts coarse horticultural charcoal

The following additives are optional:

- 5-6 tablespoons Dolomitic lime
- 5 tablespoons bone meal
- 21/2 tablespoons Triple Phosphate
- 1/2 cup of green sand
- 3/4 cup bat guano or dehydrated cow manure

**Mark Zukaitis:**

***For epiphytes (Nematanthus and actually former Koellikeria erinoides):***

First, get a bag of long fibered sphagnum moss. What I like to do is cut it with scissors into little pieces. If you have small orchid bark mix it half and half with long fibered sphagnum and throw in any potting mix just enough to look like it will retain some water. It is like Italian cooking - it is better when you ***DON'T*** follow a recipe. Just feel it. The medium must retain water but at the same time allow lots of air into the root area. Check out Mauro Piexoto's website, http://brazilplants.com/gesneriaceae/cultivogesn.html and look at his soil mix recipes. He suggests putting cut up dried leaves into his mixes as well.

If you go to any garden center, you will find a product called "Soil Moist". This is a polymer substance that looks like large grained sugar. When you add water, it goes from looking like sugar to looking like bar ice cubes, as it absorbs hundreds of times its weight in water. Keeping in mind the huge difference in volume, I would suggest plumping it up with water before you add it to the soil, and when you plant, make sure it is in the bottom third of the pot, and at that, very sparingly. Sometimes just soil humidity can make the difference (*Aeschynanthus humilis* is an example of a plant that flourishes with high soil humidity).

***Terrestrials (Some Sinningias, and scaly rhizomatous)***

Regular soil mixes generally work well for plants that are not found growing in and on trees or rooftops. Some of our best *Sinningias* are found growing rooted into the side of tree trunks, but the *Sinningia speciosas*, *Episcias* and any others found growing in the ground, however, still require lots of air to the roots. Therefore, for terrestrial plants I use any peat based soil mix but lighten it up with lots of fine orchid mix. I don't like perlite because of the whiteness, but if you don't mind it is a great "soil opener". No plant likes a dense medium, especially tropical lowland jungle gesneriads. Adding "Soil Moist" or a similar water retaining polymer is a plus, especially with scaly rhizomatous plants, who like an open mix but hate drying out. Plump the Soil Moist BEFORE adding so you get a handle on how large the crystals will become. Use sparingly.

**Bill Price (From Gesneriphiles):**

The mix I use for most of my gesneriads consists of a 1/3 each by volume of New Zealand Sphagnum moss (reconstituted pellets), perlite and vermiculite (I try to use the coarsest perlite and vermiculite I can find). To this I also add some dolomite lime and charcoal. For my *Streptocarpus*, *Chirita* and *Saintpaulia*, I use regular peat moss instead of New Zealand sphagnum.

Recently, I have been trying out the mix that the greenhouse owner (where we grew our sales plants) uses. He uses coir which I have not yet used in a mix. I am trying it with a few things ( *Streptocarpus*, *Saintpaulia* and some *Chirita*) but it's too soon to tell how it's working. Good growing,

**Our Own Libby Behnke (per Mary Schaeffer)**

Her husband, Wally, mixes the base comprised of:

- parts peat moss
- parts Michigan peat
- 3 parts 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. This base mix is further amended with an equal amount of the coarsest perlite she can find.

# *Growing Media Ingredients*

***by Kyoko Imai***

***Reprinted with permission from May 2009 newsletter of the National Capital Chapter of the Gesneriad Society, "Petal Tones."***

As any orchid grower knows, there's a wide variety of media available for growing plants. Why would we look at alternatives to the 1:1:1 mix? Well, I for one find coarse vermiculite as easy to find as... well, Stalite, for example. Also, with my flood-and drought watering habits, peat is a tricky base – peat dries rock solid and can be very obstinate about reabsorbing water. I once put a dried-out pot in a bucket of room temperature water – completely submerged – only to find several hours later that most of the potting mix was still completely dry. I've been meaning to try a coir-based mix for this very reason, but have been hesitating because of reports that some coir is very high in salts.

When mixing up some media, I think about compaction, pH, airiness, water retention, the ease with which the medium will re-absorb water, and how quickly the media will deteriorate. I might also think about media disliked by pests, or media that doesn't absorb fertilizer salts. Some of these considerations go to simulating the plant's natural growing conditions, while others are more to accommodate the grower's conditions and habits.

A common example is that mixes for wicking tend to be airier and less water retentive than mixes for "normal" watering.

Adjustments should be made according to the water's pH as well. Members who attended Bob Stewart's presentation last year will recall the discussion about pH, vermiculite, and "drainage material" in the bottom of pots. (Try inserting a wick to wick water down and out.)

As I already have a few different kinds of potting ingredients (yes, I grow orchids... and went through a media frenzy at one point), when I mix up some "mud mix" for the gesneriads I'm likely to use whatever is handy. I've added things like tree fern pieces, diatomite, LECA, and lava rock to my basic peat mix (usually ProMix) instead of perlite or vermiculite: the plants don't seem to know the difference, and some of them seem happier than before.

To illustrate some of the media available, I contacted a local supplier, Repotme.com. Repotme.com is an internet store. Arrangements can be madeto pick up purchases in Gaithersburg, Maryland. 301-315-2344. They graciously agreed to let me use their photographs and descriptions of media. (And while looking around their site, I found they have coir-based houseplant potting mixes – I wish I'd known before planting up my succulent tank!)

Aliflor, is a brand of lightweight expanded clay aggregate (LECA), such as what Jim showed us last month for growing semi-hydroponically. LECA can also be used as a component of potting mixes, or as the only ingredient (without a water reservoir) for some of the lithophytic gesneriads.

***©repotme.com. Aliflor.***

There is also nothing to stop you from using broken brick pieces: inorganic chunks with some moisture retention properties.

***©repotme.com. Brick***

For something chunky, inorganic, and that doesn't absorb water, cobblestone or pea gravel might be an option. Or how about granite chips (aka turkey grit or chicken grit), or marble chips? Granite chips are said to provide silica and micronutrients over time, while marble chips are said to provide some elemental calcium. There is also volcanic rock, of course, which is chunky and water retentive.

***©repotme.com. Cobblestone and granite grit.***

***…to be continued next month…***

# *Upcoming DAVS Meetings…*

**Tuesday, September 14, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.**
**Rockland Place, 1519 Rockland Rd,**
**Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Hostesses:** Beverages – Mary Schaeffer
Snacks – Libby Behnke

**Program:** **"Indoor Gardening from the Ground Up – Potting Media and Fertilizers."** – There seems to be an infinite variety of growing mixes ranging from popular commercial types like Promix™ to rather exotic ones like Leca stones. Discover what fellow members use to achieve their best results! The program will include discussion on additives ranging from perlite to turkey grits and fertilizers for optimal plant growth. Following the program we will have a plantlet division and potting workshop. All materials will be provided. Is their a hidden agenda? You bet! We want you to bring your surplus to the Spring Sale! We will have a clinic on potting African Violets following the program. Our first plant sale of the season 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!

**Tuesday, October 12, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.**
**Rockland Place, 1519 Rockland Rd,**
**Wilmington, DE 19803**

**Hostesses:** Beverages – Barbara Borleske
Snacks – Carol Moody

**Program:** **"Tales of Goldfish and their Kin"** – Discover the wonderful world of the Goldfish plant and its kin!

***The Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society Newsletter***
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# *Upcoming Shows and Sales…*

**October 2, 2010 11AM - 6PM**
The African Violet Society of Philadelphia presents its Annual Show and Sale "Carnival of Violets" in Cathedral Hall, Cathedral Village Retirement Community, 600 East Cathedral Road Philadelphia, PA 19128 (near Andorra Shopping Center). Information: Call Betsy (610) 489-6124 or on the web at www.phillyviolets.org

**October 2, 2010 9AM - 5PM**
The Baltimore African Violet Club presents its Annual Fall Plant Sale including supplies, self-watering pots, leaves and cuttings, and much more at The Shops a Kenilworth, 800 Kenilworth Drive, Towson, MD 21204. Information: Shirley Huffman at bshuffman2@aol.com or (301) 854-2021.

**October 3, 2010 11AM - 3PM**
The Frelinghuysen Arboretum Gesneriad Society will present "Gesneriads on the Menu" in the Haggerty Education Center at The Frelinghuysen Arboretum, 53 East Hanover Avenue, Morristown, NJ 07960. Plant Sale. Free parking and admission. Information: Karyn Cichocki at kdc05@ptd.net or (973) 579-7914.

**November 6 and 7, 2010 (See times below)**
The TriState African Violet Society will present "Violets in the Moonlight" in the Haggerty Education Center at The Frelinghuysen Arboretum, 53 East Hanover Avenue, Morristown, NJ 07960 on Saturday 1:30-4:30 and Sunday 11- 3:30. Plant Sale. Free parking and admission. Information: Jan Murasko at jmurasko@comcast.net.