



The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society

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Nominating Committee Forms

A Nominating Committee has been formed to propose a slate of officers for next year. The Committee includes Terry Celano, Chairman, Bobbie LaFashia and Mary Schaeffer. If you would like to serve as an officer of the Society, please let one of them know of your interest in being nominated for an office. The Nominating Committee will present its report at the March Meeting and will be elected at the April meeting. Members also can offer nomination from the floor. Officers for the 2010-2011 Club year will be installed at the picnic dinner in June.

Winter Weather Worries

Winter weather which may cause the cancellation of a meeting is always a concern at this time of year. The Society tends to decide whether to cancel a meeting on the side of caution. Please check your e-mail and or telephone messages before leaving for a meeting. Carol Moody is Chair of the Telephone/E-mail Committee, and either she or someone on the Committee will try to contact you in the event of a cancellation. If in doubt, call either Carol at (302) 477-1703, or Quentin Schlieder at (302) 653-6449.

Last Chance for Your Lyndon Lyon Selections

In order to increase the selection of gesneriads in the Chapter, each member is invited to submit one selection (African Violet or gesneriad) and an alternate (not costing more than \$10) from Lyndon Lyons.

The catalog can be viewed at <http://lyndonlyon.com/>. I also will have a copy of a recent catalog from at the meeting for members who do not have internet access. These are complimentary plants at no cost to you. Selections must be submitted no later than the January 12th meeting. We hope you will grow, propagate and share your plant!

Check out our new Website at

<http://gesneriadsociety.org/chapters/DAVS/>

We are indebted to Julia Mavity-Hudson who graciously assisted in formatting and posting the website.

Culture of Petrocosmea : My Way

By Tim Tuttle

Editor's Note - One of the "hottest" genera in the Gesneriad Family is the genus Petrocosmea. I have had sporadic success in growing these fascinating plants, but I have killed more than my share over the years. Tim Tuttle, a plant enthusiast from Pittsburgh, PA who specializes in the genus gave a wonderful presentation on "Knowing and Growing the Genus Petrocosmea at the Silver Spring, MD Convention last summer, and his method of growing these plants was very helpful. Time kindly gave me permission to share this two part article with members of the Delaware African Violet Society. Enjoy! I think you'll find it as interesting and as helpful as I have.



Tim Tuttle holding a few of his Petrocosmea plants. Time writes a great blog on the genus called "A Passion for Petrocosmea. You can visit this fascinating blog which features great photos at <http://www.blogger.com/profile/12100342469389913758>

Petrocosmea is a fascinating genus. While the species parryorum, nervosa, flaccida, and kerrii have been around for a few years, most of the other species were only very recently brought into cultivation. Within the past decade, around 20 new species have been introduced. Added to that, we are now finally

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learning the mysteries of hybridizing this fascinating genus, and within the past three years, more than a dozen new hybrids have appeared on our plant stands and windowsills. As interest in the genus grows, the cultural requirements are of increasing interest for the hobbyist. This is how I grow them in my home.

When attempting to understand the cultural requirements of *Petrocosmea*, one must consider the habitat of *Petrocosmeas* in the wild. Collection data for most species describes them as growing among or on rocks, usually limestone, in shady, moist, mossy, areas at 400-1200 meters elevation. This gives us insight into what they require to grow well.



Petrocosmea rosettifolia Photo by Ron Myhr. Grown by Ray Morrison. This spectacular specimen illustrates what can be done with this species, with diligent culture. Even out of bloom it is beautiful. Note how the leaves are arranged in a spiral pattern, clearly visible in this photo.

Knowing that *Petrocosmeas* in nature grow in moist, mossy areas can cause some misconceptions in culture. Growers often conclude from this that the plants want lots of water and a moist soil. One should study the characteristics of the plants themselves. Most, if not all *Petrocosmeas* have relatively succulent leaves. While the habitat is described as “moist” and “mossy” it also mentions that they “grow among rocks”. Some species are described as epipetric, meaning that they grow upon rocks. This gives us a hint about drainage requirements of the roots. Growing among and on rocks often means that the roots dry out quickly after a rain, since the drainage in a rocky area is fairly good.



Petrocosmea rosettifolia in bloom. Photo by Ray Drew. Grown by Ray Drew

The moist and mossy conditions often speak more to ambient water in the air, or humidity, **not** water **in** the soil. The soil in such rocky areas is often thin, especially if the plants grow **upon** rocks. Roots would be short and shallow, and would not sink deeply into the soil or pot. So, if we take all of these factors into account, *Petrocosmea* need a fast-draining, light soil in a shallow pan or pot. The air around the plants should be moist, or humid, but the soil should be allowed to dry between watering. In most instances, this is going to mean a soil with amendments to allow air around the roots. Watering methods and frequency should be adjusted to accommodate these requirements. The succulent characteristics of the plants reinforce these requirements. Often, failures in *Petrocosmea* culture are due to the plants staying too wet. When questioned, the grower more often than not describes that the plants “rotted”... (rotted = too much water).

Understanding the conditions in which *Petrocosmeas* grew in nature was helpful to me as I developed my cultural methods. I currently grow *Petrocosmeas* under lights in a basement. This provides an ideal environment since it stays relatively cool and the humidity is a bit higher than in the house on the upper levels. I have grown *Petrocosmeas* in about every situation imaginable, and, taking into account the habitat in nature, I have been successful. For many years, I grew them in Tennessee where the summer temperatures often soar to over 100 degrees F during July, August and early September, and still, they grew well for me. Granted, they did better during the winter in Tennessee, but still they grew acceptably well. I'll explain each aspect of culture and the techniques I use for each.

Light:

Petrocosmeas, for me, require the least light of any gesneriads I grow, with the possible exception of *Gasteranthus atratus*. They do well with amazingly little light. However, some species, such as *sericea* and minor veined leaf, look better, to me, with a bit more light. In these two species, I find that more light makes them grow more compactly, and makes the veining more pronounced in the *P. minor* and the cupping of the leaves more pronounced and the silveryness of the leaves more pronounced for the *P. sericea*.

I have grown the majority of the *Petrocosmeas* in my collection under lights for years. I grow under plain old cool white and warm white tubes from the hardware store, in a \$10 shop light. I often leave a burnt out tube in place so that I have only one tube illuminated so that the light is low. I place plants about 12 inches under the lights. I leave the lights on for 12 hours each day and they are controlled with timers to come on during the day. I like to work with the plants during the day, and prefer the lights to be on when I am working with the plants. I have not found that heat from the tubes to be a problem in any of the environments I've used them in.

In addition to lights, I have grown plants on an east and north windowsill with equal success. Living in Pittsburgh, the number of rainy or cloudy days is high, so the plants would get infrequent sunlight through these windows. They plants have done well in the natural light, but I have found it more of a challenge to maintain a perfectly flat rosette under these conditions, and the plants had to be rotated often to do so.

Soil and Pots:

Petrocosmeas have shallow roots. Pan pots or azalea pots are more suitable. I grow all of my plants in shallow pots. As small plantlets or seedlings, I grow them in 3" azalea pots with about four plants per pot. I keep them here until they are crowding each other and have strong roots. At this point, each plant goes into its own 3" pot until it outgrows this pot. Some species such as *P. forrestii* or *P. rosettifolia* may never need a larger pot. For other species, I move them into 5" pan pots when they outgrow the 3" pots. For some plants, if I do not have a shallow pan pot of appropriate size, I may trim a standard pot into a pan pot by cutting the top 2/3 of the pot off and smoothing the cut edges of the new pot. I have seen some fantastic *Petrocosmea* grows take large 8 or 10 inch nursery pots and do the same thing, by removing the top and making a "pan pot" out of the bottom. I

never would use a pot more than 3" deep for a *Petrocosmea*. If I have a pot that is too tall, but the correct diameter, I trim the top off. Using a pot that is too deep would contribute to root rot as the larger soil mass would hold unneeded water.

My soil mix is very casual in its make up. I have never been too rigid about measuring proportions and have never seen a difference in the plants in one soil mix vs. another as long as it is very light. Generally, I mix one part peat based potting soil like Scott's or Miracle Gro with one part each perlite and coarse vermiculite. (ratio = 1:1:1) I occasionally add additional lime to the mix, but again, am not that particular in the amount. I would say, I put "as large dash" of dolomitic lime when I add it at all.

I find that the key is to have a very light, fast draining soil mix. If that is assured, my *Petrocosmeas* have always done fine. In nature, no one carefully measures soil components, so I don't get too technical over it myself. I mix all my soil in a two gallon ziplock bag. I add the components, about an ounce of dolomitic lime (if I'm adding any) and about a cup of warm water, zip the bag closed and shake until everything is well mixed. I then store the bag for a week or two before use. I may make up a few bags at a time so that I always have soil mix on hand.

Repotting:

I find that *Petrocosmeas*, even as young plants, don't like to have the roots disturbed. I find that infrequent repotting works best. Root disturbance often sets a plant back for a few months, so if you are preparing show plants, take that into account. To promote soil remaining healthy for as long as possible, I often leach my plants with plain water until the water streams from the drainage holes and repeat three times. Once that is done, I allow the plants to dry out slightly, then resume my normal fertilization schedule. With this treatment, I have several *Petrocosmeas* in the same pots for three years now. They bloom heavily and appear healthy. Of course, if a plant starts to decline, the first thing I do is unpot it and examine the roots, usually, this leads to the plant being repotted with fresh soil. Doing this, I am able to salvage the majority of declining plants. If I suspect disease or pests, I often will remove healthy leaves and propagate those, then discard the original plant that is suspect.

...to be continued in February...

Did you completely disbud all plants, except maybe minis and trailers for our Chapter's March Show?

Upcoming DAVS Meetings...

Tuesday, January 12, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

The Brandywine Room at Rockland Manor, 1519 Rockland Road, Wilmington, DE 19803. Directions were published in the November newsletter and also are available on the website <http://gesneriadsociety.org/chapters/DAVS/>

Hostess: Terry Celano

Program: - “Flashback...Moments to Remember!”

Join us for a nostalgic evening as we look back at the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society through the years. Carol Callaghan and Barb Borleske will show slides and reminisce over memorable moments, plants and people. Another prop shop will round out the evening so that you will have plants for our Spring Show and Sale. 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!

Tuesday, February 9, 2010 – 7:30 p.m.

The Brandywine Room at Rockland Manor, 1519 Rockland Road, Wilmington, DE 19803.

Hostess: Mary Schaeffer

Program: “Gesneriads in the Garden” – Many

Many Gesneriads he grow successfully outdoors including hardy types that winter outdoors like *Haberlea*, *Titanotrichum*, *Ramonda*, *Sinningia* and *Hemiboea*. Others thrive in planters outdoors from late spring to early autumn and can be used to add interest to decks and patios.

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c/o Quentin Schlieder, Editor

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Upcoming Shows and Sales...

Friday, March 26, 2010 through Sunday, March 28, 2010

The Delaware African Violet Society and Gesneriad Society will present “Legacy of the Brandywine Valley, “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!* We are more dependent than ever before for member grown plants for the sale. 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 Pat Barbarita, Plant Sales Chairman. Please reserve the dates now and plan to participate!

Saturday, April 10, 2010 from 1:30-4:30 pm and Sunday, April 11, 2010 from 11am-3:30 pm

The African Violet Club of Morris County will present its Annual Show and Sale at Frelinghuysen Arboretum, 53 East Hanover Avenue, Morristown, NJ 07962. Hundreds of sale plants featuring new and unusual varieties of African violets and related gesneriads. Local growers will be available to share their growing expertise. The show will feature many horticultural exhibits, designs and an educational display. Free admission, ample free parking. handicapped accessible. Contact: Jill Fischer at HF.JG.Fischer@comcast.net or (908) 464-4417 for more information. Directions can be found at <http://www.morrisparks.net/aspparks/frelarbdire.asp>

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