

# Southern New Jersey African Violet Club

*Presents*

**"Basic Care of Your African Violet"  
September 12, 2009**

# Introduction and Origin

- The African Violet's botanical name is "Saintpaulia".
- African Violets are the most popular flowering plants in the world and currently there are over 10,000 varieties registered with the African Violet Society of America.
- African violets were discovered in 1892 by Baron Walter von St. Paul, a German botanist and governor of Tanzania who found them growing in the Eastern Arc Mountains throughout Tanzania and Kenya.
- The violet's natural home is near the tropical rainforest, close to the equator and shaded from the fierceness of the sun by a canopy of protective trees.
- There are three classified sizes – miniature (less than 6" across), semi-miniature (6" to 10") and standard (more than 10") .
- The main plant parts are the bloom, the crown, the foliage and the roots.
- The main classifications of blooms are single, semi-double and double.
- Until 1939, the only flowers ever seen on an AV were blue and single and it was not until 1954 that the first double-pink was introduced.
- African violets do not produce a scent due to their genetic structure.

# Water – 1 of 4 Basic Needs

- African violets need just enough water to keep the soil moist, but never soggy. Too much water will leave the plant susceptible to root rot and other disease.
- Method: You may water from the top or the bottom, as long as you avoid getting water on the leaves or in the crown; cold water splashed on the leaves, together with direct sunlight, may destroy the green chlorophyll, resulting in white spots. Also, do not let the plant sit in water for more than 30 minutes or it may develop root rot.
- The water should be room temperature. When the water is too cold, it chills the roots of African violets, causing leaves to curl down.
- Never use soft water. Soft water increases the sodium content and will alter the pH in your soil, thereby diminishing your plants ability to absorb water and nutrients.
- Avoid using highly chlorinated water. While some chlorine is actually necessary for photosynthesis to occur, African violets need very little. In fact, if you can smell chlorine, then your water has too much. The consequences of using water with too much chlorine include leaf burn and diminished flowering.

# Light – 2 of 4 Basic Needs

- Light is needed for photosynthesis. While photosynthesis is most often associated with a plant's green leaves and stems, its most vital function is to convert carbon, hydrogen and oxygen into usable energy called plant carbohydrates.
- If an African violet does not get enough light, it will stop flowering and its leaves will begin to turn yellow. It is also likely that the African violet which is not getting enough light will develop elongated stems.
- For natural light, choose a window location that provides indirect, warm sunlight and is at an optimal temperature between 60 and 80 degrees; direct sunlight may burn the leaves.
- Fluorescent lighting must contain red light rays for blooming and blue light rays for photosynthesis. These bulbs are called "wide spectrum" bulbs.
- Plants grown under fluorescent bulbs should have at least 8 hours of exposure per day.
- Fluorescent lighting tubes should be at a height of 12 inches above the leaves of standard plants and lower for miniatures.

# Air Quality – 3 of 4 Basic Needs

- African violets thrive in an environment that most people would consider pleasant. Therefore, if you feel comfortable, chances are, your African violets are feeling comfortable, as well.
- Optimal air temperature should be between 60 and 80 degrees in your growing location.
- Do not leave an AV plant on a windowsill during extreme cold or hot weather; it will cause stress, wilting and death of the plant.
- Humidity is the moisture content in the air around us and can be measured by a hygrometer. In their natural habitat, AVs enjoy a 70 to 80% humidity level, but can be very comfortable at a 60% humidity level in the home. However, a level under 30% is too dry and will cause premature bud loss or failure of buds to open into a bloom.
- Increase humidity by placing a cup of water near the plants. The evaporation of water will increase the humidity level surrounding the plants.

# Fertilizer – 4 of 4 Basic Needs

- Fertilizers specifically labeled for African Violets are available, but general purpose fertilizers may be acceptable as well. A good violet food should have approximately equal amounts of the primary nutrients, Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K). This is called a “balanced fertilizer”.
- Many fertilizers that have been labeled for African violets in fact contain impurities that can be harmful to violets. **Urea**, for instance, is a commonly used source of nitrogen. While it is often cheaper to use than other sources of nitrogen, urea is known to cause root burn on African violets. The damage caused by root burn reduces an African violet’s ability to properly absorb water and nutrients. The most obvious signs of root burn are a tight crown, pale leaves and/or diminished flowering. Therefore, when selecting a fertilizer suitable for African Violets, make sure that it does not contain Urea Nitrogen.

# Fertilizer – Continued

- Of the primary elements, Nitrogen is important for overall growth and the development of green leaves and stems. Phosphorus aids in the production of healthy roots and plays a vital role in the production of flowers. Potassium is necessary for the accumulation and movement of plant carbohydrates that give the plant energy.
- One final consideration with regard to fertilizers is the issue of over-fertilizing. While African violets need a certain amount of essential elements to grow and reproduce, too much can be harmful and can cause a severe imbalance resulting in a tight crown, cracked or brittle leaves, lesions on the leaves and stems, droopy leaves, and/or diminished flowering.
- In addition, it is important to drench the soil at least once a month with warm water from the top. This will wash away any excess fertilizer salts that have accumulated in the soil, while restoring the proper balance of the elements that African violets need. To leach the soil, simply drench it with water until it has become saturated, and then allow the excess water to drain completely.