

Garden Talk

African Violets

African Violets offer practically everything you could hope for in an indoor plant. Discovered in East Africa over 100 years ago, the African violet, *Saintpaulia ionantha*, has since become an all-time favorite house-plant. African violets grace many tabletops and plant stands, but are just as much at home on an office desk or filing cabinet. Their appeal is easy to understand.



Plants are available in sizes from tiny to large. The velvet foliage comes in rich dark greens and variegated variations. Continuous blooms ordain this plant in profuse blues, red, lavender, pink, white and purples.

Bloom shapes range from single petal to more elaborate multi-petal cultivators. African violets are easy to care for, consistent plant care is the key to success.

Light - Light should be bright, but not direct. In most homes, south and west facing windows offer the best light in winter. During warmer seasons, windows with eastern or northern exposures are best. African violets also do well when grown under artificial light. For the best blooms plants should have 10-12 hours of daylight each day, with a rest period of about eight hours of darkness each day. Lack of blooms and leggy growth usually indicate not enough light.

Water and Humidity - Water is the most important factor in African violet care. Keep the growing medium moist, but not saturated. Water with lukewarm or room temperature water, preferable distilled or rainwater. If you water from the top, avoid splashing water on the foliage. African violets can be watered from the bottom, but the plant should not stand in water. The best solution is to use a container designed especially for African violets that deliver the correct amount of water directly to the plant roots.

It's a good idea to thoroughly water your violets from above to flush excess salts and minerals from the soil, and to wash dust from the leaves once a month. African violets can adapt to the relatively low humidity in most homes. They perform even better with some additional moisture in the air. Containers can be placed in a tray on a layer of damp pebbles to gather moisture from evaporation. Grouping plants will also increase humidity, but make sure you do not crowd them.

Temperature - African violets do best with temperatures between 65-80°. Avoid letting the temperature get below 60°. Make sure plants placed on windowsills do not touch the glass when the weather is cold or the leaves can freeze. Air circulation is beneficial, but avoid hot or cold drafts caused by doors and heater vents.



"Blooming & Rooting"
Plant Food by ferti-lome -
Watters offer several water soluble plant fertilizers, this one is definitely best. Feed at monthly intervals or in a ½ strength diluted form every time you water.

Growing Medium - It is important to use a good quality potting soil. It must be porous to allow

adequate drainage. Soils designed specifically for African Violets also work well.

Repotting - Like most houseplants violets prefer to be slightly root bound. Repotting is still recommended every few years. Their roots grow out rather than down and standard size pots are too deep. When repotting, use a container one size larger in diameter than the one the plant is currently in.



Grown by Cuttings - Grow your own African Violets and share them with friends, it's easy. Cut a medium sized leaf from your favorite plant at a 45 degree angle. Dip in "**Rooting hormone**" powder and place in a small pot of "**Seedling Mix**" potting soil. This special blend of potting soil encourages rapid root growth from cuttings.

African Violet Problems - Most African Violet disease problems are a result of over watering or lack of light. Always remove wilted and dying flowers and leaves to discourage spreading of rot diseases. Here are a few of the more common African violet problems and their remedies.



Yellow leaves - are usually caused by not enough sunlight, improper watering or feeding. Move the plants to a brighter space, improve watering and the feeding

schedule.

No blooms - is indicative of not enough sunlight, air too cold or too dry. Move plants to a brighter space.

Brown spots or streaks on leaves - Don't get water on the leaves when watering. Use luke warm water.

Crown or stems turn brown and soft - Root or crown rot caused by a fungus that is prompted by over-

water

ing. Discard the plant. Future plants should be watched more carefully for damp conditions. Use a well draining potting soil and a container that drains adequately.

Insect problems - Watch out for mites, mealy bugs and aphids. Insects can be brought in from outside or from other plants. They can be easily controlled with a periodic spritz of Watters "**Triple Action**".

African Violets are the most popular houseplant in the United States. That's because they are easy to grow and will bloom continuously and brighten your home or office with shades of pink, purple, red and white. No other houseplant provides this colorful display, but the African Violet. Try one and be delighted at how easy they are to grow.



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