Propagation by leaf cutting

1. Choose a pot that has drainage holes; fill with a mixture of half vermiculite and half potting mix. A plastic berry container filled with perlite or coarse sand also may be used.

2. Choose a healthy young leaf that is full size.

3. Cut the stem at an angle, leaving a stem below the leaves that is 1 to 2 inches long.

4. Set the leaf into the prepared pot at an angle. Water and allow the excess moisture to drain away.

5. Place the container in a clear plastic bag and seal it tightly. You may wish to blow into the bag as it is sealed to puff it up with air.

6. Set the leaf in a bright location out of direct sunlight. Roots will form in about 1 month and plantlets in about 2 months.

7. Cut off original leaf and put plantlets in new containers.

For more information

Horticultural information on selection, planting, cultural practices, and environmental quality is available from your local Iowa State University Extension office and from these Web sites:

ISU Extension Publications—
http://www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs

ISU Horticulture—
http://www.hort.iastate.edu

Reiman Gardens—
http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu

African Violet Society of America
http://www.avsa.org

Prepared by Cindy Haynes, extension horticulturist; and Diane Nelson, extension communication specialist. Illustrations by Jane Lenahan, Instructional Technology Center.

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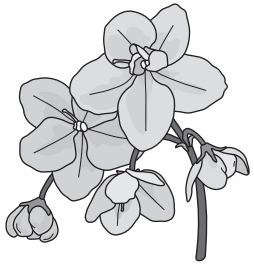
REIMAN GARDENS
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

African Violets

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

African violets are one of America's most popular houseplants. They belong to the Saintpaulia family and are not related to the hardy violets we enjoy in outdoor gardens. Under the proper growing conditions, they will bloom almost continuously indoors.



History

Baron Walter von St. Paul is credited with discovering African violets in West Africa in the late 18th century. He sent samples or seed home to Germany, and by the early 1900's they were blooming in Europe and around the world. Since then, hundreds of cultivars have been developed with an immense variety of flower and leaf colors, shapes, and sizes.

Colors, types, and sizes

Currently available flower colors include blue, purple, red-violet, orchid, lavender, red pink, white, and bi-color or multi-colored. There are single, double, semi-double, star-shaped, fringed, and ruffled flower types. Leaf types include plain, ruffled, fringed, scalloped, spooned, pointed, and variegated. The American Violet Society has 4 classes based on plant size:

- miniature (less than 6 inches in diameter)
- semi-miniature (6 to 8 inches)
- standard (8 to 16 inches)
- large (over 16 inches).

Plant care

While African violets are relatively easy to grow, they do require consistent care and attention to light, temperature, watering, and fertilization.

Light

Proper light is essential for good bloom. African violets require more light than most growers first realize. Thin, dark, blue-green leaves with long petioles indicate insufficient light. However, direct light for long periods can be damaging. Too much light produces stunted plants with leaves that are small, crinkled, leathery, and yellow.

Generally, windows with north and eastern exposures are best for African violets. However, if these exposures are not possible, they also perform beautifully under artificial lights. Fluorescent lights, suspended approximately 4 to 8 inches above the plants for 12 to 16 hours per day, will produce sufficient light to initiate blooms.

Temperature

African violets require temperatures between 65 and 80°F. Typically, temperatures below 50°F will cause leaves to darken, wither, and become water-soaked. Temperatures above 85°F will slow growth and flowering and may injure the leaves.

Watering

Watering African violets is often the most difficult part of their care. The plants require a moist, well-drained soil. If the soils are too wet, the plants may rot. If plants are too dry, growth and flowering will be limited. Water temperature becomes important during the winter months, as cold water directly on the leaves will damage them quickly.

Many people sub-irrigate African violets by placing the plant in a saucer of water and allowing the plant to soak up water from the bottom of the pot. This prevents injury from cold water on the leaves and insures moisture in the entire soil profile. However, plants should not be in water for long periods as they may rot quickly. Allow the top inch of the soil to dry before sub-irrigating again.

African violets also can be watered from the top of the soil if room-temperature water is used and the foliage remains dry. In fact, occasional top watering is recommended to prevent salt accumulation.

Wick watering is increasing in popularity. Specially designed African violet pots allow a continuous watering system by means of a water reservoir at the base of the plant and an absorbent wick that connects the soil and the water reservoir. This method is effective in maintaining an even moisture level of the soil. However, periodic leaching of the soil profile with water from the top might be necessary to prevent the accumulation of salts.

Fertilization

Regular fertilization encourages plants to bloom throughout the year. A complete fertilizer applied at a low rate is recommended. Excessive fertilization leads to vigorous vegetative growth, poor flowering, and the accumulation of salts in the soil.

Soils

A loose, porous, fertile soil or soilless mix is recommended for growing African violets. Many commercial soiless mixes are available. Refer to *Soils for Houseplants* (PM 713f) for suggestions on making soil mixes.

Diseases

Crown rot is a common fungal problem of African violets that are overwatered or recently repotted. Crown rot causes the main stem and lower leaves to appear water-soaked, shrivel, and die. Crown rot usually leads to plant death. Allowing the top of the soil to dry completely between watering will prevent crown rot.