

Cooperative Extension

*Edith Wallace, Ph.D., Master Gardener, Passaic County
Elaine Fogerty Barbour, Passaic County Agricultural Assistant*

Named after Baron Walter Von Saint Paul who discovered them, the African violet (Saintpaulia) is native to east Africa. Because African violets will flower all year in the home they are one of the most popular of all of the flowering houseplants. Colors range from white through deep purple; single or double flowers.

Propagation

African violets may be started from seed, but are most commonly propagated by leaf cuttings. This method of vegetative propagation yields plants that should bear flowers like that of the original plant. In the summer remove a firm healthy medium sized leaf with one to two inches of petiole attached. Trim petiole to 1" to 1½" and stick it ½" to 1" deep in a rooting mixture of equal parts of sand and peat. Vermiculite and perlite are also good rooting materials and can be used alone or in combination with sand, peat moss, vermiculite or perlite, or a mixture of these. Keep in bright filtered light. The stem cutting will produce a plantlet.

Repotting and Dividing

When the roots approach the sides of the pots or the plant gets too tall, repotting or dividing should be done. Do not water plants before dividing; stems should be limp so they won't snap. For tall plants, cut off one-third of the roots, planting the crown with a few leaves. It is easiest to repot in soilless potting mix labeled for African violets. Potting mixes consisting of equal amounts of peat moss, vermiculite and perlite are preferred for African Violets. African violets grow best in plastic pots. They prefer to be pot bound so a 5" to 6" pot will likely be the largest size used.

Watering

Watering the African violet is particularly important since the soil must be kept moist. Surface watering of the soil is satisfactory; however, a wick watering pot may be used. The pot can be immersed in a pail of water for an occasional soaking. Allow the pot to drain thoroughly after soaking. Use room temperature water for all watering as cold water on the leaves will cause ring spotting.

Fertilizing

After new plants have become established and new growth is started fertilizer may be applied monthly. Use a dilute solution of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 or a fertilizer labeled for African violets at one-fourth of the dilution rate at each watering.

Temperature and Humidity

Optimal air temperature is 65-75°F. Stable temperatures are best. Provide constant humidity by keeping the pots with a saucer on top of a tray filled with wet pebbles.

Light

The use of artificial light gives the best flowering, however a good window location will result in many flowers. Plants need full winter sunlight from November to the end of February (a south window) and less intense light for the rest of the year (a north facing window). If the plants cannot be moved to a different location move them further from the window in the summer or use a curtain to diffuse direct sunlight. For artificial light, use two fluorescent 40-watt soft white, daylight, or grow light-type tubes in a reflector suspended 12" to 18" above the tops of the plants. Plants should receive 14 to 18 hours of light each day (use an automatic timer).

Grooming

Remove dead flowers and damaged leaves immediately. Multiple crown plants will flower sooner if the center leaves are removed periodically in the cluster of foliage since this will allow more light for the remaining leaves. An annual root pruning in March will help keep the plant compact. Remove one-third of the roots and repot in a clean pot with fresh potting mix.

Failure to Bloom

Common causes of failure to bloom are over-fertilizing, excess or inadequate light, excess or inadequate water, or too low or high temperature.

Additional Information

Learn more about the care of African violets from The African Violet Society of America, Inc., www.avsa.org as well as local African violet groups.

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