



Houseplants: African Violets

by Jeanne Rose, Master Gardener

When most people think of gardening, growing plants outside immediately comes to mind but for some, growing houseplants is an important gardening activity.

The African Violet (*Saintpaulia*) is one of the most popular and are hybrids from species native to Central and East Africa. Plants form clusters of round-ish or pointed succulent, fuzzy leaves that are dark green on top and paler underneath. Flowers appear any time of year and can be blue, purple, white, pink, or magenta.



Their shape may be single, semi-double, or fully double. Some are even rimmed with white.

African Violets need a moisture-retaining, yet fast draining potting mix. I use commercial African Violet potting mix but some Master Gardeners combine three parts peat moss with one part perlite and one part compost or sterilized loam.

Normal household temperatures are great for growing African Violets. They need good light but shade from direct sunlight. These plants also do very well in office settings under fluorescent lights.

It's easy to start your own African violets from leaf cuttings, just ask the staff at the UCCE office. Their counters are decorated with cute pots containing violets of all sizes. Some are huge and loaded with blooms, others contain leaf cuttings. Mature leaves are used for cutting and are taken with the stems. They may be rooted either in water, being careful to keep the leaf itself dry, or in potting mix. Each cutting usually results in several plants.

However, I have successfully rooted them in water, only to lose them after transferring them to mix. One reason is that roots formed in water differ from ones formed in soil. Now I dip all my cuttings into rooting hormone, stick them four per 4-inch pot of mix, then water well. Further watering is done on the same weekly schedule as my mature potted plants.

Patience is helpful because it may take several months for new plants to emerge. When little plants crowd the pot, they are carefully separated and individually repotted into 4-inch pots where they remain until the outer leaves begin to extend over the rims of the pots. I replot one more time into 6-inch pots, the size used for all my mature African Violets.

Water on a weekly schedule with room-temperature water containing commercial African violet fertilizer diluted to package directions. Violets may be watered either from the top or from the bottom. If watered from the bottom, do not let water stand in the saucer more than two hours.

Have you noticed the double plant pots that are so popular in the stores? These are perfect for growing African violets. Just be sure to check the water level every so often.

Pick off old blooms and limp, faded, lower leaves. When plant stems get too elongated, it's time to repot. This is easy to do. Remove plant from pot, pick off lower leaves to reshape the plant, and simply repot deeper. New roots will form along the stem, and your plant will suffer little or no shock.

The greatest rewards of growing African Violets are their easy care and almost constant bloom. Plus they make appreciated gifts for friends.

Want to learn more about gardening and landscaping? The Master Gardeners have two upcoming activities for you. Annual rose pruning demonstrations are planned for Monday, January 16 from 1-3pm at the Old Grangeville Church near Hanford and on Saturday, January 21 from 10am to 2pm at the Tulare County Courthouse Roses in Visalia. In addition Master Gardeners have prepared table top displays on favorite gardening topics and will be available to answer your gardening questions. Visit our website or call our office for more information. You can learn a lot in just one day! We promise.



January 5, 2012