



## African Violets



African violets are a lovely addition to a sunny windowsill. The African violet, known botanically as *Saintpaulia*, is one of the most popular flowering houseplants. African violets are easy to grow for the beginning gardener, yet offer a wide range of cultivars to satisfy the serious grower. African violets adapt well to typical growing conditions found in the home.

A north facing window is ideal in the summer, but, if there's not enough light there in the winter, it could result in luscious, green foliage and not many blooms. A south or east facing window will provide plenty of light, but will get too hot in late spring and summer, which will result in yellow leaves and scorched edges, unless your window is nicely shaded. If this is the best available window for you and is not shaded, you will need to shade your window with a thin curtain between your window pane and your plants during the hot spring and summer months. Rotate your plants a half a turn once a month so each side gets equal sunlight. This will keep your plant growing straight and the leaves growing the same size all the way around.

Bottom watering is the most popular choice for African violets, because they don't like to get their leaves wet; water on the leaves can cause brown spots. Definitely be careful not to get water into the crown of the plant - getting water into the crown can cause them to rot.

To water, sit the pot in a saucer of water for half an hour 1-3 times a week, depending on how fast they are drying out (1-2 waterings a week in cool months and 2-3 times in hot months). Half an hour is all the time they need to soak up their required water. Do not leave them sitting in the water too long, what they don't soak up in that time they don't need. It is good to water them from the top once a month to rinse away any salt and chemical buildup on the top of the soil that can accumulate with bottom watering. Remember to be very careful not to get the leaves wet. It is best to have water around room temperature, as having it too cold can shock a plant. It is helpful to run the water and let it sit overnight; this also lets the chlorine evaporate, if you are on city water, and is better for the plants. Keep the soil evenly moist; when the top feels dry, it is time to water again. Do not overwater. You can buy soil mixes specifically for African violets. They like a light, porous soil so they don't get soggy. Their roots will rot in soggy soil. They also produce more flowers in small pots, just large enough to accommodate their root system. If you delay repotting too long, faster growing varieties will form a "trunk" above soil level where old leaves have fallen off. When repotting, bury this trunk up to the lowest leaves, and new roots will form along it.

Submitted by: Tammy Cripe, UC Master Gardener of Glenn County