

Enjoy Gesneriads!



By, Lynne Brosch, UCCE Master Gardener of Lake Tahoe

In the cold, dark days of winter it's so enjoyable to see your blooming African violet (saintpaulia) against the backdrop of a winter blizzard outside the window.

African violets are *Gesneriads* that are relatively easy to grow indoors. The main key to success usually seems to be the amount of light. They prefer north or east facing windows. Do not put plants close to the window or on a window sill. This will be too much light and a cold draft will come through the window in winter. In summer it will be too hot and bright and burn the plant. The best location is a table a foot or two away from the windows. Other than that I have usually found them not to be terribly fussy. Of course they need the house temperature at a moderate level and would enjoy some humidity.



In the winter with our heat blowing it may become a bit dry so misting them would be a good idea. There are violet planting mixes on the market. These can be helpful but not necessary. A soil for violets should contain at least 30-50% vermiculite and/or perlite. Pots designed for violets usually provide for watering at the bottom or side which is best. Also be careful to keep plant in the right size pot, preferably one that is only half the width of the plant. Proper potting and soil will provide good drainage which is important for violets. Violets prefer not to be watered from the top. Too much water on top will damage the leaves. It's also good to try and use water at room temperature.



There are commercial fertilizers available specifically for violets and if you use these following directions you may get more bloom and healthier leaves. African violets are usually prolific bloomers in reasonable conditions however. They will take a break but consistently send up new buds if they are healthy. To grow new plants simply take a leaf cutting and keep it in a small container of water until you see the roots develop. The most common varieties of violets are found inexpensively in our local grocery stores or the



larger chain stores with nurseries. There are some more exotic varieties that you will have to search specialty growing nurseries nationwide to find. For more tips on growing African violets check out the video by Bree Lake from Moana Nursery in Reno. <http://www.moananursery.com/helpful-high-desert-videos/african-violet-care.html>

Other indoor plants that are in the *Gesneriad* family are the lipstick plant, goldfish plant, the cape primrose and gloxinias. There are many others less well known. These varieties are not as easily found but if you go to a nursery that carries indoor plants you may find these.



For more information on growing *Gesneriads* check out The *Gesneriad* Society: www.gesneriadsociety.org This is an organization you can join and receive their monthly e-zine and journal. They have chapters where you can exchange information on plants and competitions. They also have a national convention. The subscription to the e-zine is free and there are many other articles and resources for your perusal on their website.

Resources:

The *Gesneriad* Society www.gesneriadsociety.org

Ortho's Complete Guide to Successful Houseplants, Marianne Lipanovich, Ed., Chevron Chemical Company, 1992, pgs. 218-225. (in South Lake Tahoe Public Library)

The Complete Book of Houseplants, John Evans; Viking Studio Books, 1994, pgs. 212-213. (in South Lake Tahoe Library)