

The African Violet

Saintpaulia ionantha, better known as the African Violet, was named for its discoverer Baron Walter Von Saint Paul, who found it growing in extremely varied parts of Africa - at sea level in a limestone crevice, and in thickly wooded land at 2500 ft. above sea level. This shows just how adaptable the plant is. *Saintpaulia* was introduced to Europe around the close of the 19th century. It reached Canada about 1930 where it became very popular.

Plenty of house plants are equally pretty, both in flower & foliage, & a great many plants are much easier to grow; but the African Violet is by far the housewife's favourite indoor plant.

Part of the attraction of the plants is in the long blooming period, and the fact that new varieties are being developed, making the hobby of varied interest. Perhaps another reason for the violet's popularity is the fact that one can - by accident or design - break off a leaf and watch it root itself, and develop into an independent plant, producing luxuriant blossoms. If you're lucky.

It sometimes seems that the violets play favourites. Certain people can stick a leaf into a glass and in no time at all have a window full of beautiful plants; other people devote the

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most anxious care to their violets and have a continual fight to keep them alive.

Some important points must be kept in mind - they are light, temperature, watering and food. The African violet requires a diffused light, and for this reason will do well in east & north windows. Southern windows will require shading with a curtain or blind. Although the plants may not be overwhelmed with light in the winter, Spring and Summer sun may prove too much for them in a southern exposure & they must be removed. Temperature should not be allowed to fall below 60, or rise above 75 degrees; any serious extremes of cold or heat will slow up the plant's development.

One of the biggest problems of the African Violet culture is that of watering. Most beginners' troubles arise from faulty watering - usually too much water. Temperature of the water is important, too, as cold water produces a condition of the foliage, known as 'ring-spot'. Soil should be just moist - never dried out, never wet.

Should the plants be watered from the top or bottom. Some experts ^{prefer} watering from the top but most growers insist that violets should be watered from the bottom. Place the pot in a saucer or container of water and allow the plant to soak up enough to moisten the soil;

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then remove and put on a dry base. Most people simply water their plants when the inspiration strikes them, or when they notice that the earth looks dry.

Violets do well by having their leaves washed, but if they are left in the sun while the leaves are moist, they may be badly burned. You may water the plant from the top, at least three hours before the direct sunlight is going to reach them. Overwatering produces two of the most frequent afflictions of African Violets. The leaf stems turn to a sort of jelly, or the entire crown of the plant seems to rot.

If you start your plants in a good rich soil mixture, you probably won't need to bother with any plant food. A good practical soil mixture is — to combine four parts of good garden soil with two parts of well rotted manure and two parts of fine sand. Allow $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of bone meal to 2 gallons of this mixture. Make sure your soil is well-drained. It is advisable to use plant food every two or three weeks.

Insect pests can be a menace to your violets and they are so small that they are hard to detect. Plants should be kept clean, wilted leaves removed, & the foliage washed occasionally to remove dust. Plants showing signs of insect

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pests should be kept away from other plants. If a plant is badly infected, it's wise to burn it and to boil the pot before re-using.

To start the African Violet from a leaf choose "healthy leaf - cut ^{the} stem to about 2" with a sharp knife. Put ^{lukewarm} water in a plastic tumbler, cover with foil or waxed paper. Make a hole in the paper to fit leaf stem. Keep leaf in water until the root is well formed, then transfer to a pot. Cover roots lightly - $\frac{1}{4}$ " is enough. Soil should be kept moist. When new shoots are an inch high, leaves size of a dime, the parent leaf can be removed. Growth at this time can be speeded by enclosing plant in a cellophane cover. One leaf may produce several small plants; these should be separated and placed in individual pots.

