

Gesneri-Eds

Volume 33

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Gesneriad Society

Issue 8

Next meeting
Sunday,
August 8
Cheekwood's
Botanic Hall
Refreshments:
Carol Ann
POTM:
Grown-for-
foliage

A Message from the President

Last weekend we took a brief family outing down to Atlanta, in hopes of seeing an example of the largest fused inflorescence in the plant kingdom.

Amorphophallus titanum, affectionately known as the corpse flower, lives up to both its names.

Unfortunately, it had yet to open out, so all that we saw was an 80" tall inflorescence, the spadix protruding out

above the frilled but still tightly enclosing spathe leaf. (No, of course this is not a gesneriad - we're talking about a really giant jack-in-the-pulpit relative, also related to *Anthurium*, *Dieffenbachia*, and *Spathiphyllum* (peace lily).) But Sam didn't really want to smell the stinky flower anyway. What we saw instead was an incredible example of what can

Our own Mike Wenzel



and his co-worker David showing us just

how titanic titanum is

only be described as a botanical garden on steroids. I mean, nothing continues and continues to grow this quickly and this well! The Fuqua Orchid Center was full of my favorites - *Stanhopeas*, *Coryanthes*, *Gongoras* and their relatives, as well as the more usually seen moth and spider orchids. There was an impressively stinky *Bulbophyllum* species with a wonderful large flower - we caught it on its last day on Saturday; when I

went back on Sunday morning it was closed up.

But come on! you say, what about the gesneriads?! Yes, they are there, in impressive abundance. They really come into their own, along with several other significant plant groups, in the "new" upper elevation greenhouse, representing the cool mountains of Ecuador and other cloud forest environs. I put "new"

Continued on

From the (co-)Editor

This month I am happy to have an article from one of our best growers in the Tennessee Gesneriad Society, Diane Fischer. Diane is an African Violet grower *extraordinaire*, and she is sharing her watering secrets for growing fabulous plants. I appreciate her willingness to share her expertise. I imagine most of us would like to be able to grow *Saintpaulias* (the "real" name for African Violets) as well as Diane does, and a few of us do, including Peggy and Alice among others, but most of us are "wannabes." I plan to implement her watering practices with my own AV's.

I have been reading a book by an English author on African Violets that Molly won in the

silent auction and gave to me. It is quite interesting, but their conditions are somewhat different from ours (which is why they grow such fabulous Streps). I am still learning a lot, but there is no substitute for instruction from someone growing in our own climate.

Speaking of advice from local growers, that brings us to the subject of this month's meeting. We will have a panel discussion where you can ask any questions you like. It's time for "Everything you ever wanted to know about Gesneriads but were afraid to ask." We did this a few years ago with great success and there have been a lot of requests for us to repeat it. Hope you can all be there.

Hopefully by the time you read this (or shortly thereafter) the winning plants from the AGGS convention flower show will be posted on the web at www.aggss.org for your pleasure. -- Julie

Growing African Violets

Diane Fischer gave me some info on African Violet care which I would like to summarize for you here. The most important thing for growing Saintpaulias is good strong light. A window with strong light is good, but a heavily shaded window (like those under porches) is not. Very mild direct sun is best, but midday sun is too strong and the plants can be shielded from it with sheer curtains. Light gets dim fast the farther you move the plant away from the window, so the closer the better. Turn the plant ¼ turn every day so it will grow evenly. If you don't have any good windows you can grow beautiful plants under fluorescent lights (burning 12-14 hours a day). The tubes should be 8-12 inches from the top of the pot, and cool white, daylight or plant lights or any combination are fine to use. If the plant reaches for the light it is too far from the tubes, if it shrinks away or becomes brittle and hard, it's too close.

Ideally, the plants should have 40-50% humidity. You can mist the plants (not when they are in the sun), group them over moist pebbles, or use a humidifier. Good air circulation is important, and a 65-70 degree F. night temperature with a 5-10 degree increase during the day is ideal.

For more information, you can check out The African Violet Magazine published by the African Violet Society of America, Inc. They have a website: <http://www.avsa.org> --Julie

Potting Mix Components

Reprinted from Gesneriad Soundings, the newsletter of the Puget Sound Gesneriad Society, Vol. 29 (2004) No. 7

Every good gesneriad potting mix begins with three basic ingredients: perlite, sphagnum peat moss, and vermiculite.

Perlite is a white mineral product derived from lava rock. It is a lightweight material which resists compaction and provides aeration in any potting soil. As a result, it is very useful in potting mixtures. Perlite has no nutritional value and little, if any, nutrient holding capacity.

Sphagnum peat moss is the least decomposed of all the peats commercially available. It can be finely or coarsely milled: peat moss that is dust like in quality is said to be finely milled and is suitable for seedlings and immature plant material while peat moss which contains easily recognizable plant parts such as roots, leaves, and stems, is said to be coarsely milled and is suitable for mature or robust plant material. Peat moss is an excellent source of organic matter and will increase the water retention and nutrient holding qualities of any potting mixture. In mixing potting soil, growers should

avoid commercially available peat moss bales which are normally used for outside landscaping, or sold for general garden use.

Vermiculite is a mineral derived from mica. It is a lightweight material which provides bulk or texture, i.e., coarseness, to soil mixes. In addition, it has excellent water and nutrient retention qualities. When used in soil mixes, vermiculite releases quantities of potassium, calcium and magnesium.

In addition to the three basic ingredients discussed above, other organic or inert materials can be added to tailor or complement a potting mix. Such ingredients include charcoal or activated carbon, pumice, lime, styrofoam beads, and long-fiber or sphagnum moss.

Charcoal helps balance the acidity of a soil mix by absorbing large quantities of acid-forming products. If obtainable, growers should use a fine to medium grade of charcoal in their potting mixtures. Lacking a good grade of charcoal, activated carbon of the type used in aquarium filters is a good substitute.

Pumice is a mineral product derived from volcanic rock. Its aeration qualities are excellent, and it can be incorporated into mixes for potting up plant material preferring a less acidic growing medium. As with pumice, lime or calcium in the form of slow release dolomite chips or crushed eggshells can be used in mixes for less acid loving plant material. Growers should avoid using fast_acting limes in potting mixtures. These include calcite, calcium oxide (quick lime), hydrate lime (slag lime) or powdered horticultural lime.

Styrofoam beads or polystyrene pearls are relatively new to the horticultural field. They are inert with no moisture or nutrient retaining qualities. They do, however, have excellent aeration qualities as well as providing texture to a soil mix. Styrofoam beads from 2mm to 3mm in diameter are recommended.

Sphagnum or long-fiber moss has been widely and successfully used in growing tuberous, rhizomatous and epiphytic gesneriads. It should not be confused with sphagnum peat moss, the decomposed product of sphagnum moss. It comes in three forms: live, dried, and milled and has excellent water retention qualities. In addition, it provides good aeration as well as coarseness or texture to a potting mix.

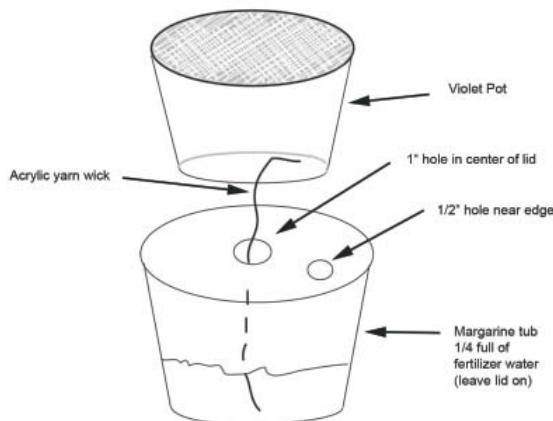
For the average grower, incorporating non-essential horticultural materials into potting mixes is not advised. These products are of dubious value and include items such as blood meal, sand, bone meal, composted steer manure, earthworm castings, superphosphate and fritted trace elements. The growing of good quality plant material doesn't require these elements, and they're most probably best left to forlornly gather dust on store shelves.



WICK WATERING

By Diane Fischer

Wicking, briefly, means the use of a reservoir of weakly fertilized water and a wick made of absorbent material which draws the water by capillary action from reservoir to root ball. Wicks can be made of any material that does not rot. Acrylic yarn works nicely. The pot can sit right on the lid of a reservoir (a margarine tub works well). Leave the lid on with a 1" hole cut through the center of the lid for the wick to go through and a 1/2" hole cut near the edge to provide ventilation. Do not fill reservoir over 2/3 full to assure this ventilation/circulation. I have found lately that I need to fill the reservoir not over 1/4 full in order to keep the soil from being too wet, so some experimenting is in order.



CAUTION: Too heavy or dense a soil used with wicking will kill your plant by over watering!! Also, if your reservoir empties and the soil dries out, you must wet the soil and wet the wick to get the wicking started again (like priming a pump). **NEVER FERTILIZE A DRY PLANT!!**

Once every 4 weeks, slowly pour between a cup and a quart of room temperature water over the soil and let it run out of the bottom of the pot into a sink or large pail. This will help flush out the build_up of fertilizer salts. When potting, use a pot ? the diameter of the plant. Use about a 3 1/2 inch pot for a 12 inch diameter plant.

FERTILIZER SOLUTION FOR WICK WATERING

In each gallon of room temperature water (let set for 24 hours to allow the chlorine to dissipate) add 1/4 teaspoon of 12-36-14 fertilizer. You can also use 15-30-15 or 20-20-20. Good

brands are Peters, Rapid Gro and Miracle Gro. Changing fertilizer once every few months is a good idea. Plants like an occasional change in the menu.

This potting method and fertilizer solution can be used on almost all house plants.

SOILLESS MIX FOR CONSTANT WATERING (WICK WATERING)

Recipe 1:
 1 part SPHAGNUM PEAT MOSS
 1 part COARSE PERLITE
 1 part COARSE VERMICULITE
 Gardening Charcoal (1/3 cup per gallon of above mix)

OR
 Recipe 2:
 1 part GOOD QUALITY AFRICAN VIOLET MIX
 1 part COARSE PERLITE
 1 part COARSE VERMICULITE
 Gardening Charcoal (1/2 c/gal)

A couple of winning entries in the national convention show: Saintpaulia 'Rocky Mountain Trail' and Sinningia speciosa regina seedling



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in quotes because when you walk through the house you would guess it has been there for at least ten years. The plants are covering the rocks, covering the trees, dripping from the horizontal branches. It can't be less than three years old!! But it is. Especially present, from our family, are representatives of *Columnea*, *Corytoplectus*, *Pearcea*, *Chirita*, *Titanotrichum* _ I believe that there are also reps. of *Alloplectus*, *Drymonia*, and *Besleria*. Soon there will also be examples of *Solenophora calycosa*, an upper elevation gesner tree, thanks to your truly, as well as some additional *Drymonia*, *Alloplectus* and *Besleria*, among others. And of course, in the back-up growing houses, there are many, many more. Cuttings of several of these are now back here in Nashville - not many of them small growers, but a couple that will be shared at an upcoming meeting.

What about here? What about this Sunday? Well, this Sunday at our meeting you will have the opportunity to ask questions of fellow growers without being shushed because there's a meeting going on. Our meeting this month is exactly that - ask questions time. It is slated as a panel discussion, but I suspect that it will be much more informal than that. So, start thinking now of what you want to ask of other members _ anything at all (plant related), and write the questions down so you remember them come meeting time. And then, just remember the meeting! Hope to see you there. Sunday, 2 p.m. - J.E.



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Gesneriads on the web -
Eastern Hemisphere

Americans and Canadians aren't the only people in the world who like gesneriads and have access to the web. For a broader perspective, here are some other sites of interest:

http://members.tripod.com/asia_flora/

LupSan's site on native Malaysian plants including gesneriads

<http://flora.huh.harvard.edu/china/>

Harvard's site for a downloadable version of *Flora of China*.

<http://cosmos.cool.ne.jp/Ges/index.htm>

"Wild Gesneriads of Japan" and cultivated ones as well (unless there are Asian episcias). Plant names in Latin.

http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/jkolehma/kotisivu/saint_info.html

Home page of a Finnish ecologist who studies species African Violets. English, mostly info, few pictures.

<http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~ur1k-ooks/entrance.html>

Ken'ichi Okishita's Room of Saintpaulia, English and Japanese versions.