

Gesneri-Eds

Volume 33

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Gesneriad Society

Issue 11

Next meeting:
Sunday,
November 14
2:00 p.m.
Cheekwood's
Botanic Hall
Refreshments:
Richard.
POTM:
Nematanthus/
Codonanthe

A Message from the President

Well, to be honest I'm not sure what the program is this month, as it seems that there have been some difficulties. But I haven't disappointed yet, and I'm sure that this month will prove no different. Of course, with the cold finally starting to come in, there may be less for show-and-tell over the next few months, but that's

all right - and some things will still be brought in boxes, I'm sure. Speaking of the cold, with the warning of a freeze later this week, I'll be bringing in the last of the over 70 plants that were outside this summer -sigh- and of course, they all

grew! Luckily, a good many of them go dormant for the winter months, although sometimes it takes a little encouragement. I brought the chocolate tree in early, not so much due to being worried about the cold, as worried that something(s), squirrels, of course, were eating all the young chocolate pods. Seven fruits are still getting larger on the tree, though it has dropped over a dozen old leaves since the move. (New



leaves are coming along, so I'm not really worried about the old ones, though they're loud enough that you hear them hit the floor when they drop off!) Back to gesneriads - my *Kohleria allenii* is still full of buds, *Kohleria rugata* x *K. spicata* is coming into full bloom, *K. 'Texas Plum*

Puddin"' is still blooming, and the *Drymonia* hybrid from the Stewarts is still in good bud and bloom as well. A few other plants are showing flowers from time to time just for fun.

On the news front, we'll likely have a good many cuttings of a few plants to distribute this meeting and next, from the Cheekwood collection that were in the cloud forest greenhouse. The week after our last meeting I had a call from Bob Brackman that the public greenhouses were being closed down, due to a combination of lack of funding and lack of adequate interest. I'll leave that sentence to be sorted out later on. The good news

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Since Paul Kroll, our planned-for speaker, had a conflict this month, we have juggled the 2005 schedule to fit him in and pulled one of next year's programs over to this Sunday. Considering that we'll have at least a few minutes devoted to distribution of cloud forest material, it may be convenient that our

From the (co-)editor

Looks like winter is finally approaching, we have had a couple of cool nights as I write this, although there still has not been a frost at our house (can we say "climate change"?). I did manage to bring in all my plants last week and squeeze them all in. Some-how, every year I take out a lot of plants and magically, the space they were in gets all filled up over the summer. Yet, somehow, (magically again, I suspect) they all get squeezed back



in. Of course, it helps that you can harvest the *Achimenes* rhizomes and put them away for the winter.

I have an interesting plant blooming in one of my terrariums, *Diastema comiferum*, it's pretty cool. I picked it up at the convention this year and plunked it in the terrarium. It's a little leggy but it's blooming pretty well.

Also blooming is Dale Martens' variegated *Kohleria* hybrid, *Kohleria 'Texas Rainbow'*. It's a nice large flower and is on a very interesting plant. *Smithiantha multiflora* is blooming, but I'm not sure it is going to hold its blooms as I had to bring it in from



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by Diane Fischer

Starting a new African Violet plant is a simple process and when done correctly is successful 95 percent of the time. Remove a leaf from the third row from the top of the crown of the plant. If possible, use a leaf from under a flower stock that is blooming true. This is especially important with fantasy blooms. Cut the stem using a sharp blade and leave no more than one-inch of stem on the leaf.

For potting a miniature or semi-miniature plant, use a 3-inch plastic solo cup; for a standard size plant, use a 5 or 6 inch plastic solo cup or Styrofoam cup. For plant air circulation and water adsorption punch two rows of holes in the lower area of the cup; the top row being about an inch from the bottom of the cup. Also, punch a few holes in the bottom of the cup. (If you plan to do several at a time, use a small diameter soldering iron to poke the holes in the hard plastic. A pencil point works fine in the Styrofoam cup.) Put perlite in the cup up to the second row of holes and fill the rest of the cup with the light-weight potting mix described by Diane in her Wick Watering article in the August 04 issue of Gesneri-Eds. Insert the leaf near the edge at an angle and press the medium around the stalk. Water lightly and put the cup in lower light for several days keeping the soil just damp. **WET EQUALS ROT.**

After a few days, give the leaf better light. It should root in about 30 days. Start bottom feeding (or top feeding) the leaf with 20-20-20, diluted to 1/4 teaspoon per gal of water. If there are several cups in a community tray or one cup in a saucer, bottom feed by pouring the dilute fertilizer into the tray/saucer up to the first row of holes in the cup.

When the babies appear, let them grow until the leaves are the size of a penny or nickle.

For a standard size plant prepare a 6 inch Styrofoam cup using the same procedure described above. For minis and semi-minis put in a 3 inch solo cup. Carefully separate the babies, place one in the center of a cup of soil mix, tapping the pot to settle the soil around the roots, and lightly water it in with plain room temp water. Keep under low light for 2 or 3 days. They can now go back into the community tray or single saucer for watering. Keep plant just damp with plain water until it is actively growing.

Do not use fertilizer water yet as it is easy to get burn at this stage. When actively growing, you can go to the constant watering method using 20-20-20 diluted to 1/8 tsp per gallon of water in the tray up to the first row of holes. Allow them to grow to a fairly good size with a developed root system before transfer to a 3 1/2 or 4 inch pot for years of enjoyment. If you wish to continue with the constant water system, a wick watering system is simple. Put a length of wet synthetic yarn thru the hole in the bottom of the 4 inch pot and clip top of yarn to rim of pot with close-pin. (See diagram in August 04 article). Cut a piece of fine-mesh plastic screen to fit inside the pot at the bottom to hold contents in place making sure the wick is above the screen. Put in 1/4 to 1/2 inch of perlite and a little soil. Then center an empty cup the same size as your plant cup in the center of the prepared pot. Fill in all around the centered cup and tap to settle soil. Soil should be

slightly damp so it will stay in place when you remove the "cup mold". Add more soil around "mold" if needed. Remove mold and close-pin, cut off the wick so end of it is below the soil surface, carefully lift your new plant from its 'baby crib', remove loose perlite from root system, place it in the hole the mold made. Add soil as needed and tap pot to settle soil around plant. Lightly water in and place new system on top of the reservoir. Just keep soil surface damp to the touch. Do not put water in reservoir for a week or two. **REMEMBER, A LOT OF SOIL AND NOT MANY ROOTS** so risk of rot is high. Feed with only a small amount of fertilizer water in the reservoir (not over 1/4 full) until plant is growing well. Happy Growing!

Achimenes

by Carra O'Daniel

If you enjoy an Easter Egg Hunt, then *Achimenes* is the plant for you! Achimenes are lovely little magical plants, starting with rhizomes that look like worms. It makes a good hanging plant. They date back to the 1700's but became more popular again in the 1900's. Achimenes may be known by some people by a variety of other names such as Magic Flowers, Cupid's Bower, or Hot Water plant.

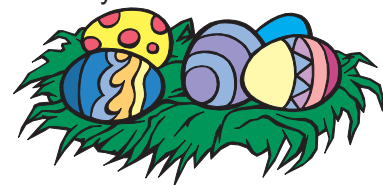
Larger rhizomes can be broken into smaller (about 1/4") pieces, only taking 6 or 8 to make a nice size blooming plant. Plant in loose mix of 1-1-1 or African Violet soil, covering rhizomes with about 3/4" moist soil. Keep them slightly moist by covering with Saran wrap (less work) till they start to sprout, then give them good indirect light. The nights need to be 50 degrees or more before putting them outside, so don't start plants too soon. Mid-April would be soon enough.

I grow all of my Achimenes outside. Since the first month of growth is the most important for a strong plant, fertilize every time you water that first month. Pinch back at about 5" height for a bushier plant with more blooms. You can also pot up the cuttings for a friend.

The shape of the flower is similar to some *Streptocarpus*, only the face of the bloom is quite flat. The bloom colors are in shades of purple, red, orange, yellow, and white. Just don't let Achimenes dry out to wilting stage - they will think it's time to go to sleep for the winter!

Just before frost gradually start withholding water till foliage dies. At that time you have a choice of cutting off the dead foliage and storing the pots in a dark, dry spot that doesn't get too cold (about 45) or you can harvest the rhizomes (hence the Easter Egg Hunt) and store them out of the soil in a cool, dry spot till the next spring then pot up. I like to harvest every other year. It's too much work every year!!!!

I have cut back to 20 different varieties now. I love these plants because I don't have to care for them year round, and I get another chance to do a better job of growing the PERFECT plant next year!!!!



At the Zoo

To take a line or two from Simon and Garfunkel, "Someone told me it's all happening at the zoo. I do believe it, I do believe it's true." What the heck am I talking about now!? Well, I haven't gone official yet with any publication about our gesneriad program here at Vanderbilt. However, I finally was able to link up with folks from the Nashville zoo about several large plants from here at the Vanderbilt University greenhouses that I knew we would never need or use, and the folks from the zoo were interested. They came out last Friday, and were not disappointed with the van full of plants with which they headed back to the zoo. Within that van full were better than half a dozen gesneriad species, most of which will go into various jewel tanks (read large terrariums) in their hidden life exhibits. It was good to start to get to know these folks, and I'm sure that more plants will be heading their way in the future. So next time you're out at the zoo, be sure and take some extra time to look closely at the plants - I bet you'll recognize some of them as "Old Friends." (yes, back to S&G for the conclusion as well.) --Jonathan

Propagating Smithianthas

by Dale Martens

reprinted from Glox News, Volume 40 Number 2, October 2004

The following is from an email on Gesneriphiles from Dale Martens, a well known hybridizer of *Streptocarpus*, *Sinningias* and *Smithianthas*.

Vincent is right that you should try propagating from leaves. I cut each leaf into 3 sections. I plant the bottom 1/3 as if it were an AV leaf. I take the top 2/3 and cut that section in half, removing the mid-rib as though I was propagating streptocarpus leaves. This time of year (nearly Spring) you'll probably get plantlets rather than rhizomes. I love *Smithianthas* and have propagated them by leaves for quite some time now mainly to distribute my own smithie hybrids.

I noticed that if the cut leaf sections are planted in AV soil in the Fall, I'll get rhizomes. If I plant the leaf sections in the Spring, I'll get plantlets. I do find it's best to propagate the leaves in a container with a lid for a terrarium environment. Choose as leaves those in the upper 1/2 of the plant rather than those base leaves. The upper leaves seem more vigorous in producing plantlets. In addition, this way you can leave the bottom half of the plant for propagating rhizomes.

Another way to propagate smithiantha is to plant leaf nodes. Your goal is to plant a single leaf and 1/2 of a split main stem. Remove the top 1/2 of the plant. Plant the very tip as if it were a tip cutting. Then cut sections so you have 1/2 the mother stem and a single leaf. Plant

these so that the mother stem is totally buried in the soil and the leaf stem is also buried in the soil at least 1 inch. This method works best if each leaf is in its own 3 ounce, plastic Solo cup. When propagated like this, a terrarium environment isn't necessary, but do keep the soil moist at all times, never let dry out. The new plantlets will sprout in the leaf nodes. You'll have a lot less success this way. In addition, you'll get fewer plants this way because you'll only get one plantlet per leaf node. By the way, when I propagate like this, I cut off the top 1/4 of the leaf tips. This seems to stimulate the leaf to create a new plantlet. (Many AV growers cut off the leaf tips when propagating AVs by planting single leaves. Why? With AVs, sometimes the cut leaf will grow rather than make plantlets.)

When plantlets are grown to maturity, they'll bloom "off season".

Message *continued from page 1*

is that at least we were contacted, along with the orchid society and a few other groups. I was able to meet the following Saturday with Michael Wenzel, formerly from here, now at Atlanta Botanical Garden. He had also been contacted, and came up with a van to load it up to take things of special import and merit back down to the garden in Atlanta. We spent some time loading up orchids and then sorting through the really significant material still left in the cloud forest. The next Tuesday I came back in and spent the better part of an afternoon collecting things, some of which I had planted more than twenty years ago. I ended up gathering in some things that I had not initially thought that I'd be interested in, as much as anything else just to honor the original collectors and out of recognition of the plants' significance as collected material. Of course, since we have plenty of room here at Vanderbilt well, there's still a cart full of stuff I'm working on that gets wheeled out of the way in the morning, and back into the greenhouse aisle in the afternoons. Carol Ann and Julie, I believe, and perhaps Molly as well, went in over the next few days and collected more materials. Carol Ann and I even went back the next Sunday and collected up the majority of lava rock/feather rock that wasn't cemented into the stream area, since there was no interest on Cheekwood's part in holding onto that either. So, the election isn't the only thing that went down this month, nor the only thing that reminds us that there's still an incredible amount of educating about species, ecosystems and the value of the diversity of life on our planet. Perhaps there will be some discussion about that at this Sunday's meeting as well. It will be a good one, regardless, I can promise you that. Hope that we'll see you there. --Jonathan

I will be bringing the plants we rescued from the cloud forest greenhouse this Sunday, along with a generous supply of lava rock, in case anyone wants to make a trough garden out of one - or twenty. Among the offerings - some columneas, some aroids, a begonia, and a few pieces of orchid. Of course, we did leave plants behind, but I don't have room for a philodendron that's seven feet wide - do you? --Carol Ann

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From the (co-)editor *(cont)*

outside to the greenhouse. It also has very yellow leaves, I think the result of not enough fertilizer. With all the rain we have had this summer, I'm afraid all the nutrients have been washed from the soil of most of my plants that were outdoors, and I was not very good about fertilizing them. I was quite surprised to see it bloom at all. I have real trouble blooming *Smithianthas*, for some reason the blooms always seem to blas, though the plants grow just fine and set blooms regularly.

I feel like my email box is overflowing with goodness today, I have wonderful articles from 2 of our members for the newsletter!

I would like to thank Diane for her excellent article on growing African Violets from leaves. Let me just clue you in, trust her, she knows what she is doing. She raises some fabulous plants, not just AVs but many other gesneriads as well as begonias and other families. When Diane brings in a problem plant that she wants advice on curing it usually looks better than

my best plants. I think you will learn a lot from her article.

I also want to thank Carra for her very informative article on *Achimenes*. These are favorite plants of mine and lately I have been having trouble growing them. I think this piece will help me fix my problems lets see how they do next year!

While Im thanking people, I also thank Jonathan for always coming through (well, almost always!) with copy for me every month.

Our program schedule is being reshuffled once again this month due to our prospective speakers schedule. We will see an AGGS slide show this month and will have the speaker in May, I believe. This is an excellent show, it is on *Nematanthus* and *Codonanthe* and their intergeneric hybrids, and there is a very good script that goes with it. I showed a brief preview of a few of the slides last month, so if you were there you know it will be good. I hope you will join us for this interesting program.

Julie



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