

Gesneri-Eds

February 2010

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Gesneriad Society

Volume 38 Issue 2

Next meeting:
2:00 p.m.
Sunday,
February 14
Cheekwood's
Classroom
POTM
miniatures
Refreshments:
Vicky

A Message from the President

I am sorry I won't be there for the next meeting this month. I will be in Florida and then in San Diego with Julie for The Gesneriad Society board meeting and retreat. I am sure Dave will do an excellent job with the business meeting and then the program on planting a terrarium. I have given him some small terrarium plants as presents to share with you all. Anything not used at the meeting can be held over for sale at the Lawn and Garden Show. Besides a few gesneriads, I am rooting cuttings of other companion plants which are all small growers.

I was excited to see my first blooms on some *Columnea* which I had never seen bloom before. I had decided to expose all my *Columnea* to the cool autumn air outside before the first frost. I knew that many *Columnea* grow in the cool rainforests and many species especially need cool weather in order to bloom. So, my experiment of letting them experience that cool down period really worked. For those of you who can't expose your *Columnea* to a cool down period, there are, of course, some that will bloom in all seasons. My favorites are *Columnea* 'Early Bird', *Columnea sanguinea*, and *C. schiedeana*. *Columnea* 'Early Bird' was voted the most popular *Columnea* years ago, and it still can't be beat. My *Columnea sanguinea*, which I grow in a window because it is large, is constantly in bloom. The blooms on mine, which are of the light yellow variety, are insignificant with

a light green calyx, but the leaf markings add interest. It sets seed easily and the berries will make lots of little babies. Strangely, when I take cuttings, it doesn't seem to want to rebranch at the tips. This may be because of the odd way its leaves grow; some are large and some are small. But it will produce lower side branches. *Columnea schiedeana* has attractive striped blooms and it usually blooms heavily in winter for me. The other *Columnea* in my collection are all blooming now, but the bloom is not as heavy as on these three.

My *Chirita* and *Kohleria* are also mostly blooming and haven't really stopped blooming for most of the year. I guess they have to be my favorites. I would like to maybe let my *Kohleria* go dormant to save on space, but they are blooming so well now, I can't give that up. *K. 'Peridot's Kitlope'* is especially a real winner. But I am also enjoying a couple of *Petrocosmea* in bloom. One, which I picked up at the convention last July, is called *Petrocosmea* species #5. It has lovely foliage like *P. begonifolia* and large bright blue flowers. I read Tim Tuttle's blog <http://petrocosomea.blogspot.com/> about *Petrocosmea* and I found out the main reason some of mine are not looking as well as they could is because they are in semi-dormancy. I was glad to know that, because I was worried about how bad they look with their crunched up middles.

Hope to see you all in March when I return.

Dam

February's program is all about terrariums, especially miniature ones. We'll share ideas, have a good time and build a little island of green in a protective shell that requires very little maintenance.

I regularly give miniature terrariums as gifts to people who like plants but don't have the time or the ability to care for potted plants. They grow well in offices and homes under fluorescent lights. I keep several in my office and am never without blooms to add a little color to my day. I'll also bring what I believe to be one of the world's smallest terrariums.

If you'll bring your imagination, I'll bring:



Long fiber Sphagnum
Soiless mix
Peat moss for top dressing
Decorative pebbles
Sticks, moss, lichens
Micro Sinningias

Pam has donated some cuttings suitable for terrariums and those will be available too.

If you would like to create a larger terrarium, please bring your own container, soil, plants and decorations.

See you there,

Dave

Culture of *Petrocosmea*: My Way

By Tim Tuttle

Reprinted from *The Newsletter of the Delaware African Violet and Gesneriad Society* Vol. XII, No. 5, January 2010

Editor's Note - One of the "hottest" genera in the Gesneriad Family is the genus *Petrocosmea*. I have had sporadic success in growing these fascinating plants, but I have killed more than my share over the years. Tim Tuttle, a plant enthusiast from Pittsburgh, PA who specializes in the genus gave a wonderful presentation on "Knowing and Growing the Genus *Petrocosmea* at the Silver Spring, MD Convention last summer, and his method of growing these plants was very helpful. Tim kindly gave me permission to share this two part article with members of the Delaware African Violet Society. Enjoy! I think you'll find it as interesting and as helpful as I have.

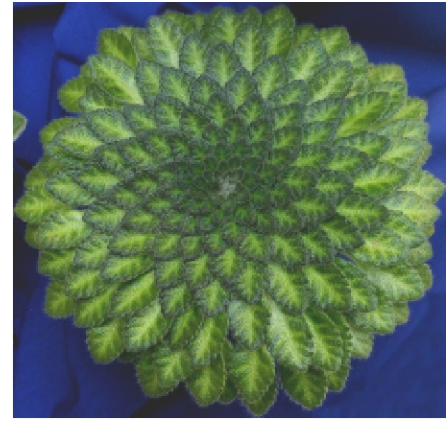


Tim Tuttle holding a few of his *Petrocosmea* plants. Time writes a great blog on the genus called "A Passion for *Petrocosmea*. You can visit this fascinating blog which features great photos at <http://www.blogger.com/profile/12100342469389913758>

Petrocosmea is a fascinating genus. While the species *parryorum*, *nervosa*, *flaccida*, and *kerrii* have been around for a few years, most of the other species were only very recently brought into cultivation. Within the past decade, around 20 new species have been introduced. Added to that, we are now finally learning the mysteries of hybridizing this fascinating genus, and within the past three years, more than a dozen new hybrids have appeared on our plant stands and windowsills. As interest in the genus grows, the cultural requirements are of increasing interest for the hobbyist. This is how I grow them in my home.

When attempting to understand the cultural requirements of *Petrocosmea*, one must consider the habitat of petrocosemas in the wild. Collection data for most species describes them as growing among or on rocks, usually limestone, in shady, moist, mossy, areas at 400-1200 meters elevation. This gives us insight into what they require to grow well.

Petrocosmea rosettifolia Photo by Ron Myhr. Grown by Ray Morrison. This spectacular specimen illustrates what can be done with this species, with diligent culture. Even out of bloom it is beautiful. Note how the leaves are arranged in a spiral pattern, clearly visible in this photo.



Knowing that petrocosemas in nature grow in moist, mossy areas can cause some misconceptions in culture. Growers often conclude from this that the plants want lots of water and a moist soil. One should study the characteristics of the plants themselves. Most, if not all petrocosemas have relatively succulent leaves. While the habitat is described as "moist" and "mossy" it also mentions that they "grow among rocks". Some species are described as epipetric, meaning that they grow upon rocks. This gives us a hint about drainage requirements of the roots. Growing among and on rocks often means that the roots dry out quickly after a rain, since the drainage in a rocky area is fairly good.



Petrocosmea rosettifolia in bloom. Photo by Ray Drew. Grown by Ray Drew

The moist and mossy conditions often speak more to ambient water in the air, or humidity, not water in the soil. The soil in such rocky areas is often thin, especially if the plants grow upon rocks. Roots would be short and shallow, and would not sink deeply into the soil or pot. So, if we take all of these factors into account, *Petrocosmea* need a fast-draining, light soil in a shallow pan or pot. The air around the plants should be moist, or humid, but the soil should be allowed to dry between watering. In most instances, this is going to mean a soil with amendments to allow air around the roots. Watering methods and frequency should be adjusted to accommodate these requirements. The succulent characteristics of the plants reinforce these requirements. Often, failures in *Petrocosmea* culture are due to the plants staying too wet. When questioned, the grower more often than not describes that the plants "rotted"... (rotted = too much water). *continued on page 3*

Culture of Petrocosmea continued from page 2

Understanding the conditions in which petrocosmeas grew in nature was helpful to me as I developed my cultural methods. I currently grow petrocosmeas under lights in a basement. This provides an ideal environment since it stays relatively cool and the humidity is a bit higher than in the house on the upper levels. I have grown petrocosmeas in about every situation imaginable, and, taking into account the habitat in nature, I have been successful. For many years, I grew them in Tennessee where the summer temperatures often soar to over 100 degrees F during July, August and early September, and still, they grew well for me. Granted, they did better during the winter in Tennessee, but still they grew acceptably well. I'll explain each aspect of culture and the techniques I use for each.

Light:

Petrocosmeas, for me, require the least light of any gesneriads I grow, with the possible exception of *Gasteranthus atratus*. They do well with amazingly little light. However, some species, such as *sericea* and minor veined leaf, look better, to me, with a bit more light. In these two species, I find that more light makes them grow more compactly, and makes the veining more pronounced in the *P. minor* and the cupping of the leaves more pronounced and the silveryness of the leaves more pronounced for the *P. sericea*.

I have grown the majority of the petrocosmeas in my collection under lights for years. I grow under plain old cool white and warm white tubes from the hardware store, in a \$10 shop light. I often leave a burnt out tube in place so that I have only one tube illuminated so that the light is low. I place plants about 12 inches under the lights. I leave the lights on for 12 hours each day and they are controlled with timers to come on during the day. I like to work with the plants during the day, and prefer the lights to be on when I am working with the plants. I have not found that heat from the tubes to be a problem in any of the environments I've used them in.

In addition to lights, I have grown plants on an east and north windowsill with equal success. Living in Pittsburgh, the number of rainy or cloudy days is high, so the plants would get infrequent sunlight through these windows. They plants have done well in the natural light, but I have found it more of a challenge to maintain a perfectly flat rosette under these conditions, and the plants had to be rotated often to do so.

Soil and Pots:

Petrocosmeas have shallow roots. Pan pots or azalea pots are more suitable. I grow all of my plants in shallow pots. As small plantlets or seedlings, I grow them in 3" azalea pots with about four plants per pot. I keep them here until they are crowding each other and have strong roots. At this point, each plant goes into its own 3" pot until it outgrows this pot. Some species such as *P.*

forrestii or *P. rosettifolia* may never need a larger pot. For other species, I move them into 5" pan pots when they outgrow the 3" pots. For some plants, if I do not have a shallow pan pot of appropriate size, I may trim a standard pot into a pan pot by cutting the top 2/3 of the pot off and smoothing the cut edges of the new pot. I have seen some fantastic *Petrocosmea* grows take large 8 or 10 inch nursery pots and do the same thing, by removing the top and making a "pan pot" out of the bottom. I never would use a pot more than 3" deep for a *Petrocosmea*. If I have a pot that is too tall, but the correct diameter, I trim the top off. Using a pot that is too deep would contribute to root rot as the larger soil mass would hold unneeded water.

My soil mix is very casual in its make up. I have never been too rigid about measuring proportions and have never seen a difference in the plants in one soil mix vs. another as long as it is very light. Generally, I mix one part peat based potting soil like Scott's or Miracle Gro with one part each perlite and coarse vermiculite. (ratio = 1:1:1) I occasionally add additional lime to the mix, but again, am not that particular in the amount. I would say, I put "as large dash" of dolomitic lime when I add it at all.

I find that the key is to have a very light, fast draining soil mix. If that is assured, my petrocosmeas have always done fine. In nature, no one carefully measures soil components, so I don't get too technical over it myself. I mix all my soil in a two gallon ziplock bag. I add the components, about an ounce of dolomitic lime (if I'm adding any) and about a cup of warm water, zip the bag closed and shake until everything is well mixed. I then store the bag for a week or two before use. I may make up a few bags at a time so that I always have soil mix on hand.

Repotting:

I find that petrocosmeas, even as young plants, don't like to have the roots disturbed. I find that infrequent repotting works best. Root disturbance often sets a plant back for a few months, so if you are preparing show plants, take that into account. To promote soil remaining healthy for as long as possible, I often leach my plants with plain water until the water streams from the drainage holes and repeat three times. Once that is done, I allow the plants to dry out slightly, then resume my normal fertilization schedule. With this treatment, I have several petrocosmeas in the same pots for three years now. They bloom heavily and appear healthy. Of course, if a plant starts to decline, the first thing I do is unpot it and examine the roots, usually, this leads to the plant being repotted with fresh soil. Doing this, I am able to salvage the majority of declining plants. If I suspect disease or pests, I often will remove healthy leaves and propagate those, then discard the original plant that is suspect.

To be continued in the March issue of Gesneri-Eds.

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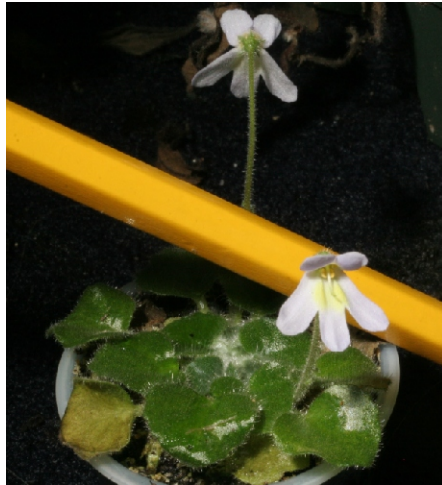
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From the (Co-)Editor

I am so sorry I won't be here to join you this month, I would have really enjoyed the program. I (along with Pam) will be in San Diego at the Board of Directors meeting of The Gesneriad Society. I'm sure I will have fun there too, though, and will see you all the following month.

Hope all your plants kept warm during our recent really cold weather and snow. It was pretty and it has been a long time since we've had any so I guess we were due. I am really tired of the rain, though. It's really nice to go to our gesneriads and see the bright flowers to cheer us up.

Since we seem to be talking a lot about petrocosemas lately, I wanted to share that some of the ones I brought back from convention (generously given to me by Tim Tuttle) have been blooming and I have really enjoyed them. I have them on a plant stand which I have enclosed in plastic, which raises the



humidity. They are also on capillary matting and seem to be doing pretty well. One which was interesting was *P. barbata* #2. It bloomed at a really tiny size, which you can see by the photo which includes a pencil for size comparison. It is still quite small though not blooming any more. As Pam mentioned, it is probably taking a little rest. Maybe it will bloom for our show later this year.

Don't forget to put down cuttings for the annual Lawn & Garden Show in March. This is our main money making event, so we need all the plants we can get.

Here is an interesting instructional video on growing Gesneriad seeds:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqe4B2gEb-8>

This same producer has an interesting YouTube Channel with a lot of information at

<http://www.youtube.com/user/nightbeacon>

My photos from Bill's visit are posted at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/julie.mavity/BillPriceVisitToTGS#>

See you all in a month; have fun at the meeting. *Julie*

An Update on Elsie Quarterman, Life Member

Aunt Elsie is so much better than we all have expected her to be, and we are so relieved. She has physical therapy three days a week now and has done great. She's off the high risk fall list and has started sleeping for about a week now maybe four hours, then up and down still about every hour-and-a-half. We hope it will change but we are glad to four hours sleep at one time. Pat and I have decided to keep our sitter Mondays through Thursdays, and we also have a back up who's willing to stay overnight at anytime. We might try to take our first



night out this Friday night together since things are doing so much better. Aunt Elsie gets bored not being able to do things and with her eyesight the way it is it's hard to keep her content. She loves to hear how things are going in the club and what you're working on but realizes she's not much help. Please tell everyone she loves visitors at anytime and we thank all of you for caring. - *Elsie's niece Ann Q*

Gladys Stewart, Life Member

In December Molly and Pam visited Gladys Stewart, an active TGS member for many years. Although her health now limits her activities, she enjoys following the club through *Gesneri-Eds*.



Due to scheduling conflicts with Cheekwood, there will be some changes in the proposed TGS calendar. An updated calendar will be posted in the March issue.