

Gesneri-Eds

March, 2010

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Gesneriad Society

Volume 39 Issue 3

Next meeting:
4:30 p.m.
Sunday,
March 7
Nashville
Lawn & Garden
Show

A Message from the President

My plant shelves are crowded with plants for the Lawn and Garden Show that is coming up. I am hoping to bring things which may be of interest to my fellow gesneriad fans, besides plants to sell to the general public. I wish I could have propagated more gesneriads, but I am also committed to another plant sale right afterward. And my shelves can only hold so much. Besides gesneriads, they are full of rooted cuttings of coleus and ivy and other house plants. I have decided this year it would be good to have a display in our booth with photos of gesneriads in bloom. That way, if you have plants without blooms, we can sell them better by showing them photos of what they will look like in bloom. I also went on the internet and copied and printed out little photos of some African violets I want to sell and which have no blooms yet. I have glued the photos to plant labels to put in the pots. I will be there on Wednesday afternoon to set up. I won't be able to be there Sat. & Sun., as I will be out of town. Please try to volunteer your time to man our booth. It is hard for only one person to

be there at a time. Even if you can only be there a short time, it would be great, and you will want to look at what might be for sale. (Note: Julie, what about the process of them getting in for free to work the booth. I always just slip in the side door to bring my plants and work, etc.)

Besides plants with labels (I will bring extra labels made out of mini blinds), we will need some boxes and bags for carrying plants that are sold. I will bring some black table cloths. Julie and Carol Ann are supposed to furnish handouts for our chapter membership, plant information and a couple of membership packets for The Gesneriad Society. I purchased a few extra *Gesneriads*, the journal for TGS. They cost me \$6.00 each, if anyone is interested in purchasing them. I plan to have them there at the sale, but don't want them to walk away for free. They will be there to show the public what they would get if they join the international society.

I also wanted to report about the TGS board meeting Julie and I attended in San Diego. It was fun,

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From the (Co-) Editor

The Lawn and Garden Show is upon us. Set-up is Wednesday March 3, and the show is open Thursday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. This is our money-making (hopefully) event of the year, so we really need your help. We will need people to man the booth, preferably two people at all times. Please email me (julie.mavity@gmail.com) or call me at 364-8459 to let me know when you can work. We also need PLANTS to sell. Please bring your plants on Wednesday if possible, or as soon as you can anyway. Remember that you get to keep 80% of the profit if you would like, which will give you plenty of money to buy other members' plants! If you would like for me to print you out some African violet labels possibly with little pictures on them from the program 1st Class, be sure and email me the variety name and how many you have of each, please do this well ahead of time so I will have time to print them at work as my home color printer is broken.

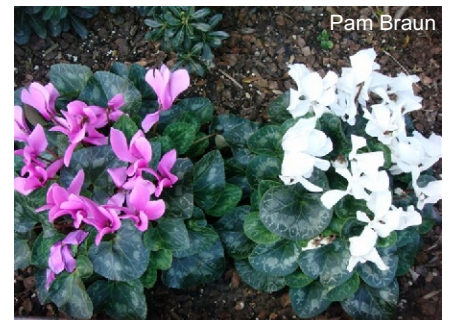
Sadly, this may be the last Lawn and Garden Show, certainly it will be the last one in this venue since the Fairgrounds will be closed at the end of the year. Let's all hope that they will find another venue to have this preview of Spring.

Pam and I were sorry to miss the meeting last month; I bet it was really interesting. We went to San Diego to a meeting of the Board of Directors of The Gesneriad Society. We had a productive meeting and a good visit with good friends. We visited the San Diego Botanical Gardens (formerly Quail Gardens) as well as the Mecca of Gesneriad Lovers, Kartuz Greenhouses. That was a wonderful place, full of gesneriads and begonias and passifloras. Wow, that was fun. I didn't go overboard buying plants, though I have an order which I had placed earlier which will come hopefully in a few weeks. I noticed Pam bought quite a few plants.

We also saw the ocean, just a block or two from our hotel, where there were many seals, moms with babies, including two which were born just the day before we arrived. It was also interesting to see the plants they grow well there which we cannot grow. Seeing cyclamens growing as bedding plants was pretty neat.

See you at the Show!

Julie



Culture of *Petrocosmea*: My Way

Part 2

By Tim Tuttle

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

Watering:

I have grown *Petrocosmeas* wick watered on reservoirs, by bottom watering, top watering, and using capillary matting. Today, I am still using all four methods and they all seem to work fine. I use the capillary matting for most of my plants however, for several reasons. First, it allows me to water a large number of plants at once, saving time. This is a big deal for me since I often work 50 or more hours a week. With the matting in nursery trays, I have several plastic domes which I use to cover the trays. The barely damp matting keeps the humidity high in the plant room and with the domes, it gets near 100%. If I am growing plants for hybridizing, I use this method exclusively for those plants, since I want the humidity to be very high to ensure better success with hybridizing. To make the mats, I purchase very cheap acrylic blankets from the dollar store. They usually run about 3-4 bucks each. I measure them to fit the nursery trays and cut them out to twice the width of the tray so that I can fold them over to create a double layer of matting in the bottom of the nursery trays. For an 11 x 22" tray, I would cut out a section of blanket that is 22 x 22". When these become stained with algae, I stick them in the washing machine with some detergent and bleach and they come out sparkling clean again. NOTE that they are 100% acrylic. Any natural fibers like cotton or wool would rot quickly. I set the plants on top of these mats, water until the mats are saturated, but not with water standing above them, and that's it. They plants will stay barely moist for a week or so. I allow the mats to dry a bit between watering and then re-wet them. I usually DO NOT add fertilizer to the water I saturate the mats with. I prefer to fertilize my plants one at a time, so that I pick up each plant, inspect and groom it, and then fertilize it and I replace it.

When using the top watering or bottom water, I add a bit of fertilizer to the water and fertilize each time I water. I allow soil to dry out between watering. When using reservoirs and wicks, I keep the reservoirs filled with very dilute fertilizer water and allow the reservoir to dry out so that the plants do not remain constantly wet.

For small seedlings or plantlets, I may use a syringe with a small tip so that I can water without drowning or dislodging the little plants. This method works well for tiny little seedlings that have just been potted up from the seed pot. They are often very tiny. Another method that works here is to bottom water.



Fertilizer:

As with my soil mix, I am not too rigid in my fertilization techniques. I use a variety of fertilizers but with all of them, I use them in very dilute amounts. I generally use 1/8 teaspoon fertilizer per gallon of water. The fertilizer I use most often is Dyna-Gro. I also use Miracle Gro, Miracle Gro Tomato fertilizer, and Schultz. I find no difference in any of them, however, I feel that a variety is better than staying with one alone, since they are all variable in the amounts and types of nutrients they contain. I use these for seedlings and for mature plants. I fertilize about once a month all year round. I leach plants at least twice a year to remove salts buildup. I begin to fertilize seedlings almost as soon as they germinate.

Pests and Disease Control:

While I am pretty casual about most aspects of *Petrocosmea* culture, this is one area where I am pretty disciplined. I rarely have ever had a problem with either pests or disease in *Petrocosmeas*. The only pests I have seen on them are mealy bug and thrips. Prevention is always the best control. I isolate new plant material by sealing it in a ziplock bag for a couple of months minimum. Among my collection, if a plant looks suspect, I isolate it, and often take clean leaves and root those, while immediately discarding the suspect plant. No whole collection.

To control pests, I add Bonide (active ingredient is imidocloprid) systemic granules when I pot plants. I sprinkle a few granules into the pot as I add soil. This lasts for six months. Doing this, I find I never need to apply a second application because that plant and the soil are clean and I am strict about isolating new material coming in. On two occasions over the last several years, I have reapplied the Bonide granules to existing plants when I was concerned for a thrips infestation. I rarely have even seen thrips on *Petrocosmeas*, but I HAVE seen them, so I know it is possible. If I see thrips, I remove all blossoms and add Bonide granules.

The last point is to keep the growing area clean. Remove spent flowers and leaves and any other debris. When I remove blossoms for a possible thrips attack, I am sure to remove them from the house immediately. I seal them in a plastic bag and take them out to the trash bin ASAP. I remove the matting and wash with bleach at least twice a year. I wipe down surfaces with Chlorox wipes occasionally and spray a bit of Lysol from time to time. I wash and bleach used pots before reusing them. Air circulation helps too. Again, this is a tip from the natural habitat of the plants. In nature, there are breezes and constant air movement. Keeping the air moving in the growing space is an excellent way to prevent mildew and molds. I keep a couple of small oscillating fans on the

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Culture of Petrocosmea continued from page 2

low or medium setting in the room at all times, day and night, summer and winter. For the plants under domes, I remove the domes while I am in the room with the plants and replace them when I finish. That allows fresh air to move around the plants. When using the fans, do not have the fans directed so that the air blows directly on the plants constantly. A gentle sweeping breeze is excellent. Direct air flow can dehydrate the plants quickly.

Temperature:

Once again, we have hints from the habitat of *Petrocosmea* to give insight into what *Petrocosmeas* need. The elevation at which the plants are found suggests they like things on the cooler end of the range for tropical plants. In my basement, the temperatures regularly get down to the high 30's in the winter. I have documented temperatures at 38 degrees F several times. The plants were happy and healthy. I saw no ill effects from these temperatures.

While growing *Petrocosmeas* in Tennessee the temperatures in the spare bedroom where the plants grew regularly got into the low 80's during the warmest months of summer. I would keep the plants on the floor and lowest shelves of the plant stand and on the matting. I also kept the fans running and increased the speed a bit. The extra humidity and the increased air movement seemed to keep the plants happy. I have offered this tip to a grower in Arizona, and once she tried this, she was finally able to grow *Petrocosmeas* successfully.

Propagation:

Petrocosmea can be propagated from seeds, division, offsets, or leaf cuttings. I have used all of these methods with equal success. The most common method used is usually leaf cuttings. Even the tiniest of leaves will produce plantlets if given the right conditions. As with culture, *Petrocosmea* leaves like moisture in the air, with good air circulation around the roots. So, a heavy rooting medium contributes to rot. A lighter medium works best. I usually use chopped milled long fiber sphagnum moss mixed 1:1 with perlite, barely moistened. The moss contains some iodine, which may help prevent rot. Sphagnum's ability to hold the slightest amount of moisture without being saturated seems to work well for rooting *Petrocosmeas*. I have also used one to one mixtures of perlite and vermiculite and my regular potting medium with success, although I have to watch more closely for rot. I always root the leaves enclosed in either a ziplock bag or inside one of the transparent plastic craft or shoe boxes from WalMart. I buy them in large quantities for under a dollar each. I can stack them on top of each other under the lights and the plants still get enough light to root well.

I find that a shorter petiole on the mother leaf works best. I trim the stem on the leaf to about 1 cm or 1/3 inch before inserting it into the rooting medium at a 45 degree angle. Leaves root all year long, but form plants more quickly in spring and summer. Once I see plantlets forming, I water with diluted fertilizer.

Offsets, once removed, are treated just like leaf cuttings until they form roots. Some species like *rosettifolia* offset freely. *P.* species 'China 2005' also forms lots of offsets. These can be removed and rooted easily.

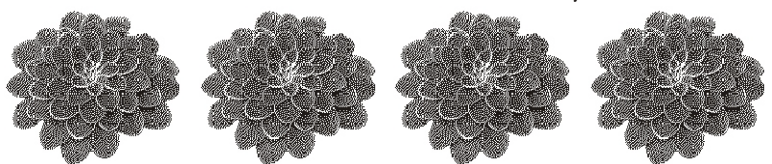
I treat *Petrocosmea* seeds like every other gesneriad seed with one exception. *Petrocosmea* seeds have failed to germinate for me on three occasions, when I kept them warm. In each case, the same lot of seeds, when replanted and kept cool, germinated well. One other grower has reported this same observation when she kept the newly planted seeds warm. Seeds generally germinate in about 2-3 weeks from planting.

General Tips:

1. When grooming *Petrocosmeas*, do NOT brush the leaves. *Petrocosmea* leaves mar easily and even the lightest brush will often scratch or mark them. To remove dust, I routinely shower the plants with lukewarm water using the nozzle at the kitchen sink with a gentle stream. I also "blow" on the leaves forcefully with my mouth to remove debris on a show plant, etc. Also, using another hairy leaf such as an African violet leaf as a "brush" can help to clean leaves of dust or debris. But, NO BRUSHES!
2. When attempting to grow *Petrocosmeas* in the warmer or drier climates, I recommended using capillary matting and increasing air movement while keeping the plants as low to the floor as possible. I've heard from a couple of people who were never able to grow *Petrocosmeas* in these conditions that this helped dramatically.
3. When separating small plantlets from the base of a mother leaf for propagation, allow the plantlets to get quite large first. I leave them until they are much larger than most would expect, they often appear cramped and overgrown by this point. This allows the plantlets to form more roots and they do much better and grow more quickly once potted up than if they are removed as small plantlets.
4. If you experience molding of the planting medium when sowing *Petrocosmea* seeds, a light spraying of Lysol, so that the mist settles onto the medium works. DO NOT spray it directly into the pot. Spray it over the pot so that the mist falls onto and into the pot. I hold the can about a 12" over the pot and spray at an angle in the direction of the pot but not directly into the pot. This does not seem to harm the seeds or seedlings if the mist is lightly applied.

I have written this in an effort to share what I have learned about my favorite genus of gesneriads. My hope is that you will find something in this paper helpful. Should you have further questions, please feel free to email me at Plantman87@hotmail.com. Put the word "*Petrocosmea*" in the subject line.

Tim



President' Message

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and the weather was very nice, mostly cool enough to wear a light sweater. The hotel where we stayed in La Jolla was very near the ocean, and we walked down to photograph the seals on the beach. We also took photos



Succulents at Quail Botanical Garden



Spectacular beach scene

of the tropical plants they can grow there out in the open. We especially liked the cyclamen growing in front of city buildings. I wonder if they had mites?

We also took a field trip to the Quail Botanical Gardens where we had a final board meeting. We saw succulents that were huge compared to what we can grow here in TN as houseplants. I



Lastly, we drove to Michael Kartuz's greenhouses. Unlike here, his greenhouses, made with plastic, are mostly open to the outside. They only have the very occasional very light frost there, if any. I, of course, purchased some plants, though most of them were not gesneriads. He was going to give me some interesting Nematanthus cuttings, but somehow in the rush to leave, they were left behind. I will just have to see about getting some later. It seems like it is impossible to purchase and grow all the gesneriads you really want. I will propagate the plants I did bring back, and try to share them as they grow larger. I had to try to isolate them from my other

especially liked some small buildings in the children's play area which had beautiful succulents growing on the roofs. I am a fan of pachyforms, succulents which grow with enlarged trunks and root systems. They had some there I could only dream about growing. Unfortunately, I don't remember seeing any gesneriads there.



Succulents in a San Diego garden



plants, because they were grown almost outside and might have a few pests.

If I don't see you this month, I hope you will all attend the April meeting when we have the propagation workshop and share plant cuttings.

Dam

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The 2010 Nashville Lawn and Garden Show - Artistic by Nature

For many years the Nashville Lawn and Garden Show has been TGS's major source of income. The income is split 17.5% for the club, 77.5% for the grower and 5% for the Lawn and Garden Show. While the boost to our treasury is great, this is also a great opportunity to sell the *idea* of gesneriads, to show the public what fascinating plants they are and to teach people how to grow them. To that end, we'll have pamphlets and new member pack available.

Wednesday setup	Pam, Molly, Carol Ann*
Thursday a.m.	Dave, Rosa
Thursday p.m.	Diane, Chuck, Pam
Friday a.m.	Brad, Diane, Chuck, Pam
Friday p.m.	Diane, Chuck, Pam, Molly 2:00→?
Saturday a.m.	Diane, Chuck till 2:00p.m.
Saturday p.m.	Dave, Carol Ann
Sunday a.m.	Diane, Chuck till noon
Sunday p.m.	Julie, Dave, Molly till close

*I'll be driving to Mary's Greenhouses in McMinnville Wednesday morning to buy plants for the sale, so my arrival time at the Fairgrounds will depend on how long I spend at Mary's and whether I get lost on the way. ☺
 We have passes to give you so workers can get into the show for free. There are only four club name tags, and we must *not* lose any because they won't give us any more!

Sale plants should be labeled with the name of the plant (actually written on the pot is a good idea) with a separate removable label with your initials and the price. This is how we determine how much each grower has sold.

I'm assuming our booth will still be in the same place, on the right just inside the annex past the Floral Gallery. If you can't find us on Wednesday, check at the office.

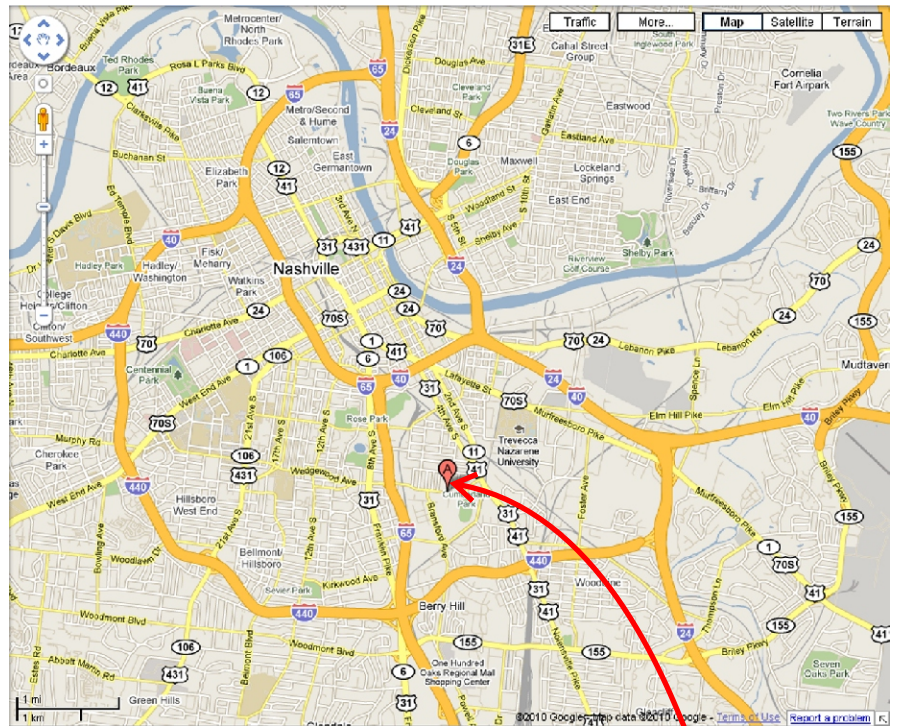
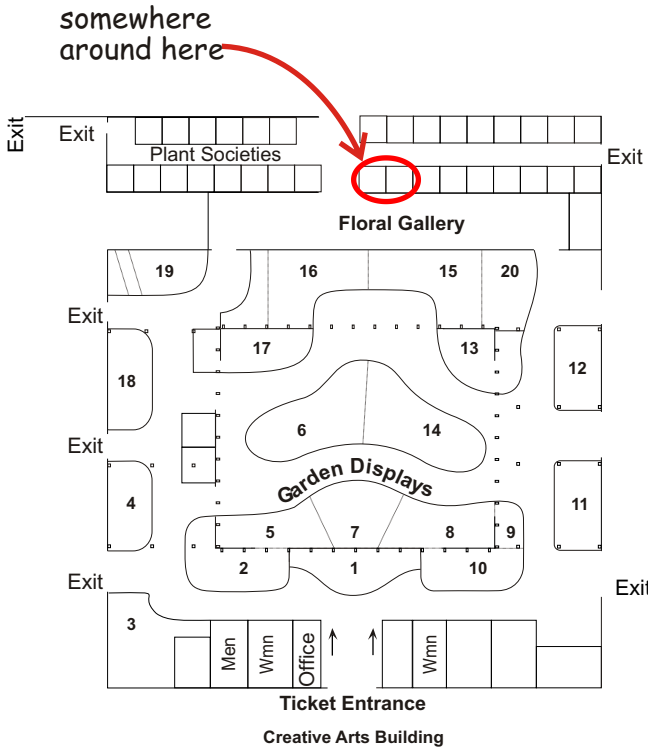
Please donate plants or time or both. This is one of the best ways we have to attract new members, so we want to have as nice a booth as possible with tons of information and enthusiasm.

For more information, see the Nashville Lawn and Garden Show's website

<http://www.nashvillelawnandgardenshow.com/> or

call me at 293-5470 or email me at cabonner@gmail.com.

Carol Ann



Tennessee State Fairgrounds