

Gesneri-Eds

Volume 34

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Gesneriad Society

Issue 1

Next meeting
Sunday, Jan 9
2:00
Vanderbilt
Greenhouses
See page 4 for
map and
directions

A Message from the President

So, here we are starting into another year, continuing to fervently pray for the three 'E's - environment, education, and economics, as well as for all the troops. Without getting too political, the one that will affect the focus of this group most, at least in theory, is our prayers for the environment. (But personally, I wouldn't let prayer for the other areas drop too much if I were you.)

The president's holiday gathering was impressively and delightfully well attended this year, with over a dozen members getting together to roam through the house a bit, see some of my latest terrarium ideas and plans, and enjoy good food and good company. We had the good fortune of having one of our newest members with us, along with her spouse for moral support (I'm not sure who needed it more, but they both seemed to have a good time), and we had several of our long time members as well (note how I avoided saying oldest members there?!). I do believe that a good



Orchids and bromeliads growing on a cork log in one of Jonathan's large terrariums

time was had by all. The Plexiglas container at the top of the stairs is now complete except for the waterfall rock, which is still undergoing some testing. I believe that there will be some shots of it in this very newsletter, thanks to an invited visit from Julie to see how the new

branches worked out, et al. Among several aroids and orchids, it has seven seedlings of *Gasteranthus tenellus* (we'll see how many come along), as well as two plants of *Besleria hirsutissima*, and my convention purchase of *Episcia* 'Star of Bethlehem.' And of course I did fail to point out during our gathering the several Chiritas that are doing quite well in the top of the stairs enclosed hanging shelves. But, if they'd been in

bloom they would have pointed themselves out. Not being in bloom, they look like attractive rosettes, and we've all seen those before, after all.

As for the greenhouses at Vanderbilt, this is the third year for visiting them, but there will still be some things not seen before to excite and entertain all this

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From the (co-) editor

Julie Mavity-Hudson

Our club is apparently becoming more and more computer connected as I have a number of people who are now being sent the newsletter by email as pdf files (portable document formula for you non-computer people). If there are those of you who are not receiving the electronic version and would like to, please email me at julie.mavity-hudson@vanderbilt.edu and I'll be happy to send it along. It will come earlier than the printed one and the pictures will be in color as they usually are in the printed version, so you won't lose out. You can also print it yourself if you like, or just store it in your "TGS" folder on your hard drive (doesn't everyone have a TGS folder? :-). In addition, if anyone would like to stop receiving the printed version and receive only the pdf, let me know.

Our weather has been most confusing the last few weeks with really cold then really warm weather. It will be interesting to see how many of the sinningias and other gesneriads that our club members are wintering outside survive. Hopefully, most of your plants are staying snug and warm inside. I almost ran out of gas for my greenhouse heater and was just about to the point of having to drag in hundreds of plants when they finally showed up with it.

Our meeting this month is a real treat. The Vanderbilt greenhouse is a wonderful place to visit. Under the expert management of our own Jonathan Ertelt, there are many wonderful plants to see. It's almost like being in a tropical jungle. I find myself going up to visit fairly often. Even if you went last year it's still worth going again this year as there are always new plants to see and different things blooming.

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Growing Gesneriads from Seed

by Wallace Wells

Reprinted from *Glox News*, the newsletter of the Greater New York Chapter, volume 39, no. 1

"Just a spritz of water on top and nothing more," I remembered Maryjane Evans saying to me a few years ago on how she sowed gesneriad seeds. "No fertilizer or anything." It takes a bit of time and courage to overcome the seemingly daunting challenge of growing seeds into flowering plants. Much greater are the hurdles of properly turning and priming them for exhibition for others. However with only a bit of attention gesneriads can easily live up to their reputation as being "Miracle Houseplants" because they are actually not hard to grow this way. Once the challenge is done just once, the process can become quite habit-forming.

Our recently-deceased longtime chapter member Maryjane Evans, who brought so many plants to our sales table was also for many years the AGGS seed chairperson. Her job was taken over by Bob and Carol Connelly of Michigan who continue the fine tradition of offering seeds of hundreds of gesneriad species and hybrids at reasonable prices.

Gesneriad seeds are small but usually fertile, quick to germinate and easy to raise. Growing plants from seed is easily accomplished even in the most cramped domicile in which many of us New Yorkers reside. Flowering specimens of *Sinningia speciosa* (florist's Gloxinia) can be produced within six months with only a reasonable amount of effort. Gesneriad seeds usually sprout quickly and form a thick mat of seedlings. They have to be thinned out at about 30 days or else they will starve each other for nutrients in the soil and turn yellow. My own general rule as a small apartment grower is to sow a three inch square 'plot' in a deli take-out tray. At 30 days thin to six to eight plants. Thin to about a centimeter in diameter around selected seedlings. At 60 days transplant to small individual containers; a small medicine cup or two inch pot will do. At 90 days they go into a four inch container. At this time usually I bring half of the harvest to the sales table since space constraints require this. The remaining three or so plantlets are grown to maturity; the best shown and the others given away. Gesneriads vary in the time needed to reach maturity. Some of the smaller microminiature and miniature *Sinningia* species can be flowered in 90 days. Many times they even self seed as I can now observe on my kitchen-sink-side garden. I am now flowering a batch of *Sinningia speciosa* 'Avanti' that were sown in late March less than six months ago. The longest maturation I have experienced was with *Streptocarpus*

dunnii which took about 30 months. But what a thrill! It was worth the wait. Seeds I got in October 1994 eventually flowered in April 1997 on my southern-exposed windowsill with no added light. There is no other way short of traveling to South Africa to see this vermilion-plumed beauty in flower since it can not be propagated by any other means. Some of our chapter members are currently 'cooking' this one from seeds sent to me in June 2002 from South Africa and distributed as seedlings in May of this year during our 45th anniversary yacht trip. We will see if anybody comes through to the end!

The address of the AGGS seed fund can be found on the AGGS website at <http://www.aggs.org> or by subscribing to *The Gloxinian* which publishes the offerings twice yearly.

Of Note - New Interesting Reading

Seeds of Fortune by Sue Shepherd

reviewed by Wallace Wells

Reprinted from *Glox News*, the newsletter of the Greater New York Chapter, volume 39, no. 1

A few years ago I was rummaging through some prints at the Sixth Avenue flea market in the Chelsea district of Manhattan when I came across a stunning illustration of a gesneriad I had grown once before. The illustration was of *Smithiantha cinnabarina*, although I don't think the caption stated it as such. It seemed very old. In the corner was the word 'Veitch.' It was not until years later that I deciphered the mystery of the print, its origin and the meaning of the words in the corner. The print had been published in a nineteenth century garden book in France; "Veitch" was not the publisher but instead the company which originally offered the plant for sale. Originating in Scotland, the Veitch dynasty migrated and reestablished in the town of Exeter in Western England and got into the plant business in the early 1800's. They stayed in business through five generations until they finally fizzled out in the late 1960's. Very successful in their day because of their jungle-jumping collectors, they offered many gesneriads and other tropical species to satisfy the torrid thirst of the Victorian plant fever. Their story is wonderfully told in this recently published book. If eye-popping gesneriad illustrations are one's fancy this book is a bit disappointing (there is actually one really nice one) but for explanations of many plant name origins and a general sense of the horticultural milieu of era the book excels. Most people would recognize the name "Lobb" in the context of

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plant *Aeschynanthus lobbianus*, the most familiar of all 'Lipstick Plants,' but few would realize that there were actually a pair of Lobb brothers who collected plants for the Veitch firm and as well collected many other Asiatic gesneriads.

Another famous collector who traveled in Chile, Bolivia and Peru was named Pearce. Get it? Genus *Pearcea*. It would be nice if more books of this type were available in English about the other French, German and other European collectors of this era as well, since we will be stuck with their names for a long time. I still don't understand much about the elusive Gloxin for whom the genus *Gloxinia* is named except that he was a Swiss physician, died young and wrote a book in the 18th



century on plants. Unlike some gesneriad names used today, the collectors for the Veitch firm actually did see and understand these plants in then-native habitat and were not merely being honored by someone else, i.e. part of a "Dead Botanist Society" honorific.

It's odd to consider that in the current era when many nice gesneriads can be bought at garden centers (or even at my local grocer, Gristedes, in the produce department, NO KIDDING) there was once a time when intrepid souls had to risk life and limb to collect these plants. Many died at an early age from tropical diseases and other misfortunes. Now we can find out more about them. It's worthwhile. - - W. Wells

Smithiantha cinnabarina grown and photographed by Toshihiro Okuto. From www.gesneriads.ca

From the (co-) editor Continued from page 1

At my house I have a number of things blooming, including several *Saintpaulias* (African Violets), a few *Sinningias*, several *Chiritas*, including *C. minor*, *C. gemella* and one or 2 others. *C. minor* is especially interesting. The flower basically only has lower petals, the upper ones are too tiny to notice. It's a really dark purple too, and with the very glossy foliage it's pretty neat. I grow this one fairly potbound, in a soilless mix with lots of perlite, on capillary matting under a 2 tube fluorescent fixture with 1 cool white and one full spectrum light. It's about 5 inches from the light.

I am starting a new series of articles on how members of our club got started growing gesneriads. I am starting with myself as I am the easiest to motivate. I would appreciate everyone following my example. Please send me your story; otherwise you will be drafted. I will be glad to edit, so just get it down in any form you can. You can email, mail or give to me personally.

Hope to see you all at the meeting. *Julie*

How I Started Growing Gesneriads

Julie Mavity-Hudson

When I was a teenager I was crazy about plants and had a very large garden full of flowers. My father's mother, Muncy Mavity ("Mammy" to us) grew gorgeous African Violets and *Achimenes*. She called her *Achimenes* (almost certainly 'Purple King') Monkey Faces. My mother also liked them and Mammy gave us

some rhizomes to grow. We grew them in old washtubs in regular garden soil and they were really beautiful. When I got married the first time at age 19 (yikes!) she shared leaves of her African Violets with me and taught me how to root them and transplant them as the babies grew. I had windows full of them, growing in soil as we grew everything back then. I loved them especially since they came from her as she was one of the most wonderful, caring, kind and tolerant people I have ever known.

Some years later I moved to Nashville, got a divorce, and remarried. I went to 100 Oaks shopping mall and saw a Tennessee Gesneriad Society plant sale and was immediately hooked. I bought tons of plants and went to the next meeting which was at the home of Elsie Quarterman. This was in 1979, which I remember because I was just starting my new job at Vanderbilt University, and in fact took one of my new co-workers (since moved away) with me to the meeting. I was hooked, big time. Within a few months I became the newsletter editor, and not too long afterwards was president. I haven't looked back since. I grew almost strictly under lights for many years, through yet another divorce, and living single for a few years and another remarriage. My wonderful husband Eddy (luckily for me it was third time's the charm instead of three times and you're out) built me a greenhouse for my birthday and I've enjoyed growing in the greenhouse, under numerous lights and outdoors ever since. I can't imagine being without plants and seem to get more and more every year. Hopefully I will continue to grow them in some form or another as long as I live.

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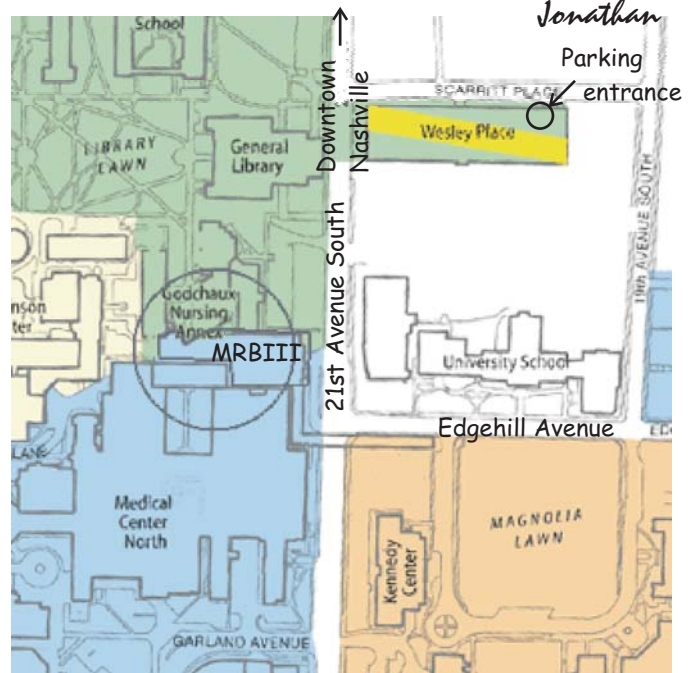
coming Sunday. We also will have some comfortable place for sitting and discussing whatever needs to be discussed (hopefully not very much). We will be meeting in the Wesley Place garage, as we have previous years, and then carpooling over to get at least closer to our campus destination. I suspect that there have been directions provided previous years that will once again be printed elsewhere in this esteemed publication. So, hope that we'll see you all on Sunday, and best wishes for a wonderful, peaceful and productive new year.

Sunday's meeting -the Logistics

As several of you may recall from our discussions last year, or personal experience, parking close to where you want to be at Vanderbilt University can be problematic to say the least. We think that we have made a difficult situation a little easier by making the following arrangements.

We will be allowed to park in the Wesley Place Garage after the reserved spaces stop and zone 2 parking begins. Turn off of 21st onto Wesley Place (Alpine Bagel on one side of the street, Ben and Jerry's on the other) and go down to the second entrance to the garage on the right side of the street. Pull on in and up the ramp to the right, and keep going around until you're just on your way to the fourth level. If I'm good, you'll either see me or a large TGS parking sign where you can start parking. We'll be parking and meeting there from 2 - 2:20. At 2:20 promptly, we'll load everyone into the two

or at most three largest vehicles and drive over to the loading dock of the new building where those two or three vehicles will safely be parked for the duration of our meeting. This will provide us easy access to an elevator up to the seventh floor, keeping our walking to a realistic minimum. Arriving after 2:20 means you're on your own trying to figure out how to get up to the greenhouses, i.e. don't be late. If you need a contact person that day you can call Julie's cell phone, (615) 364-8459. Given this driving arrangement, do not bring more than you can comfortably hold in your lap for a short trip.



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