

# Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of  
The Gesneriad Society

Volume 44 Number 1

January 2013



*Smithiantha cinnabarina* grown by Andrew Norris

## President's Message

New Years is a time for reflection. We all vow to make improvements in our lives. If not realistic or too ambitious, resolutions quickly fall by the wayside.

How can we make NCAC an even better club? Our newly elected board will be wrestling with this task throughout the year. The elected officials are myself, Jim Roberts as Vice President, Barry Woolf as Treasurer, Harold Belcher as Secretary with Directors: Kyoko Imai, Donna Beverin and Andrew Norris. We are not yet sure how often we will have the Mid-Atlantic Regional Gesneriad Show, but I am committed to having a local flower show this year--- one way or another. Come to our next meeting January 12 at 12:30 PM and voice your

## NCAC meetings are held at the National Arboretum.

Doors open at 9:30am with the meeting starting at 10:00am on the second Saturday of the month.

**Time Change!!** January 2013 meeting will be held at the National Arboretum at **12:30pm** "Dog Show" / Culture Workshop

## Meetings for 2013:

February 9	March 9	April 13	May 11
September 14	October 12	December 14	

**Membership dues reminder:** \$10 per household  
Barry Woolf, NCAC Treasurer  
1301 Malus Court, Fallston, MD 21047 or bring to meeting.

opinion. The program, coincidentally, will be a **Dog Show**. A Dog Show is not only a lot of fun, but it is also a way to learn what you could improve on culturally. Bring any poorly grown, funky gesneriad--- except no diseased or bug infested plants please! Read on a little further in *Petal Tones* for more instructions about the Dog Show.

One of my personal resolutions is to not procrastinate so much this year. I write this on New Year's Day after I rescued the last of my *Sinningia* tubers that were grown outdoors. The tubers look great. It is amazing how well some gesneriads tolerate the cold. Even more of a surprise, *Nematanthus* 'Tropicana,' which I had harvested for cuttings and forgot to bring indoors, still has green leaves! I know the temperature has been down to freezing some nights. Plants, like people, have a remarkable ability to survive.

Brian Connor

## Ask Mr. Gesneriad

Barb Stewart asks:  
I have *Seemannia* 'chic' and need some cultural information on this plant. I have heard that it should not dry out, but it is a rhizomatous plant. Shouldn't it just go dormant when it gets dry? I am currently growing it on a wicking tub. I couldn't find much information on line, so any cultural information would be helpful. I have tried unsuccessfully to grow this plant several times in the past.



Mr. G: *Seemannia* 'Chic' just like the other *Seemannias* do not like to dry out between watering. If it does it will not only produce rhizomes, but will start to send out oodles of spaghetti-like aerial rhizomes (or propagules) which will reach out and search for a better location to grow (not a problem in nature but sure messes up the pots adjacent to it under lights). It's a relatively easy plant to grow. Just keep it moist and in high light until it has finished flowering. At that point the leaves will start to yellow and you can allow it to dry out between watering to encourage rhizome production. One more tip: *Seemannias* like to be "overpotted." When the roots run into the sides of the pot the aerial rhizomes start to form. The plant will seek out more root space any way it can. Try potting it in a bulb pan. These pots are shallower than a standard pot and allow plants with shallow spreading roots the space they need.



## January Program – “Dog Show” / Culture Workshop

by Jim Roberts

We all have problems with the growth of some of our plants. Maybe it's something that we've admired in a friend's collection but just can't seem to figure out how to grow it in our conditions. Or maybe it's something that has looked really good for us in the past but is WAY past its peak and looks really bad right now. Whatever the cause for the "dog," bring it in as an entry in the January Dog Show. Naturally, we want to protect the identity of the plant, so make up a new name to go along with "unconventional" growth your plant may be showing. For example, a *Saintpaulia* with multiple crowns: *Saintpaulia* 'Hydra'; or a really leggy *Columnnea*: *Columnnea stemii*. The exhibitor of the plant with the most original name, as voted upon by the entire membership, will be awarded a special prize by the Propagation Committee.

Plants will be judged according to standard Gesneriad Society rules. However, the Blue ribbon will be awarded to the plant with the lowest score, the Red ribbon to the plant with the second lowest score, and the Yellow ribbon to the plant with the third lowest. In order to be eligible for a blue ribbon a plant has to score less than 50 points. A red must be less than 60 points and a Yellow must be less than 70 points. Plants must be disease and insect free – we don't want your problems going home with your competitor!

*Following the judging and awarding of prizes, plants will be discussed and recommendations given to the grower (who can remain anonymous) on how to improve the appearance and general growth of the entry.*

Plants will be self-entered. Please write the name of your entry on a 3" x 5" index card, along with the Section and Class that it should be entered into. Entries will be accepted from 12:30 to 1:00, with judging starting promptly at 1:00. Judging will be an open discussion on each and every entry.

### Show Schedule

#### Section I – Tuberous Gesneriads in Flower

Class 1: Rosette Growing *Sinningia*

Class 2: Upright Growing *Sinningia*

Class 3: Miniature *Sinningia*

Class 4: Other Tuberous Gesneriads

#### Section II – Rhizomatous Gesneriads in Flower

Class 5: Kohleria, Seemannia, Gloxinia  
Class 6: All other Rhizomatous Gesneriads

### Section III – Fibrous Rooted Gesneriads in Flower

Class 7: New World Upright Growing Gesneriads  
Class 8: New World vining or trailing Gesneriads  
Class 9: Old World Gesneriads

### Section IV – Gesneriads Grown for Ornamental Value other than Flowers

Class 10: New World Tuberous  
Class 11: New World Rhizomatous  
Class 12: New World Fibrous  
Class 13: Primulina and Petrocosmea  
Class 14: Other Old World Gesneriads

### Section V – Artistic Arrangements – Remember, this is a “Dog Show.” Not following the schedule will help you lose points and put you in the running for a ribbon!

Class 15: Slippery Slopes – An all white arrangement giving one the feel of the ski slopes.  
8” x 8” x 8” niche size  
Class 16: January Thaw – A planting of live material, showing the return of warm weather in the midst of winter. 12” x 12” x 12” niche size.

### Section VI – The Arts

Class 17: Photography  
Class 18: Painting, Drawing  
Class 19: Other Crafts

## The Importance of Being Aggressive in Thrips Treatment and Prevention

By Andrew Norris

A scary new virus has turned the gesneriad enthusiast and violet grower on its heels. Surely everyone has heard of the virus, most commonly called INSV, standing for Impatiens Necrotic Spot Virus. The virus has been seen to lay dormant for long periods (6 months to a year), some plants never show symptoms and act as reservoirs, symptoms vary and aren't always easy to diagnose, without lab confirmation, and available home testing is expensive and not always accurate. Whole businesses and entire collections have been devastated. We must act to preserve our collections and, indeed, our entire hobby

is at risk. It is imperative we take measures to eliminate the spread of INSV, by being vigilant and diligent, regarding preventing, detecting, and eliminating thrips, the insect responsible for spreading the virus and the primary source of infection in our collections.

Thrips have a complex lifestyle, one beginning with eggs laid in the soil or underneath the surface tissue of plant's leaves and stems. From the egg, hatches a nymph or instar, then a second instar, then a prepupa, a pupa, which is buried in the soil, and finally, the familiar adults, seen spilling pollen amongst our blossoms. Female thrips can reproduce without a mate, producing all female offspring, when unmated and male offspring, when fertilized by a male. A look outside, during the summer will show a multitude of them in every day lily. This is an indication of just how easily they are acquired, being let in open windows and doors, tracked in on clothing and pets, as well as being carried into our homes on infested plant material...even cut flowers pose a risk.

Thrips are increasingly resistant to many pesticides and their unusual life cycle makes elimination difficult. Prevention is our best defense. Prevention, of thrips is a two step process and involves isolation and prophylactic use of pesticides. I hate using chemicals and poisons as much as anyone else, but when my entire collection and the collections of every hobbyist I associate with becomes target for devastation, I see using a product with a toxicity less than caffeine and used in flea collars, a minor discomfort. I am referring to Marathon or more accurately, its active ingredient Imidacloprid. Imidacloprid is available as Bayer and Bonide formulation as well, but Marathon is a widely used and fertilizer-free product, sold by Cape Cod Violetry and other gesneriad suppliers. Imidacloprid is useful for several reasons. It can be applied at the time of potting, as granules in the soil mix, which last for 60 days or longer, it can be sprayed, in liquid form from above, and it is systemic, meaning it is taken into the plant tissues and protects the plant by killing any insects that feed upon it. The Imidacloprid is useful against the first and second instars, prepupa, and adults, if the plants are disbudded. It is important to note that, although the pesticide is systemic, the molecules of the pesticide are too large to effectively be transported to the tissues of the blossom stems and flowers. This is why disbudding for a period is essential in any treatment plant. Pollen is the preferred diet of mature thrips and its protein content

is what allows female thrips to reproduce in great numbers. It is my recommendation, that we apply the granules to EVERY newly potted plant or cutting, tuber, rhizome...anything that may have been in contact with infested plants or potting mix. Following the application of the granules, I advise you to remove every bud and blossom and place the plant in isolation, not exposing it your collection until after 30 days, even better to have seen a bloom on the isolated plant that has been seen to be free of thrips, after the 30 day isolation. That isolation period is not adequate to prevent INSV from entering your collection and may not show other pest, such as mites and mealies, though mealies will be killed with the Imidacloprid as well. INSV, is likely in all of our collections already, it just has yet to show up as sickly plant and may never show, so it is preventing the spread from plant to plant, we need to focus on. I feel it is important to note that I have seen collection treated with these granules and still infested, but after I treated the plants, with the same product, the pest were eliminated. I believe my method of application must be why. To treat a plant with Imidacloprid granules, I prepare the new pot, by placing a small amount of soil in the bottom. I check the soil is the right amount, by placing the plant in the pot and adjust accordingly. Once settled on the amount of mix, in the pot bottom, I sprinkle  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the dose on top of the potting mix, place the root ball on top, then apply the remaining granules to the top of the root ball, and cover with potting mix. This ensures the roots are in contact with and able absorb the product effectively.

If you treat all of your incoming plant material in this way, disbudding, before you bring the plant home and treating and isolating, you can avoid further pesticide use and monitor with sticky cards, blue being said to work best for thrips. This is the approach I take. It is important to really look hard at your collection and be sure that there are no thrips, if you are not going to continue to use the granules with every potting. There are some intriguing biological controls, we can use on plants that are free of pest and have not had granules applied, after proving to be pest free. These include minute pirate bugs, a predatory insect with an insatiable appetite for thrips, and predatory mites, that also prey on other pest, such as cyclamen mites and immature thrips and their eggs. One can grow carnivorous plants, such as sundews and butterworts among their collection, which act as living sticky cards. These items can be

found, along with their recommendation for use, cultural information, and application densities for prevention, and control, online, by typing them into a popular search engine. I would like to try the mites, myself.

If thrips are found in your collection, in spite of your best preventative efforts, I have a few methods for eliminating them have worked for me and have not required disbudding for three months or longer. I think the safest approach, for a small collection is to use 2 Tablespoons of Rid, Lice Shampoo, per 32 oz sprayer of warm water and add to that 1 Tablespoon of Murphy's Oil Soap. Place the plants in the bath tub, remove all open blooms and buds that are not tightly closed, and spray the plants, getting every surface, until the solution runs out of the pot bottom. Let the plants sit for at least 20 minutes and no longer than 40 minutes, though 20 minutes is sufficient and has never damaged my plants. Rinse the plants with a warm stream of water from the shower, until all suds are gone. This has been 100% effective for me, with one application and no further need to remove blooms. The downside is that it should be done on the entire collection at one time and is rather daunting for a large collection.

For larger collections, you could disbud and repot with Imidacloprid granules, but that is daunting. What I did, when I found thrips in my collection recently, (Admittedly, I had fallen into the trap of thinking my favorite vendor at a show could not have bugs.) I disbudded every plant, sprayed Raid flying insect killer, with Permethrin (synthetic pyrethrin, as found in lice shampoo), listed for indoor use, over all of the plant to knock down the adults. I then applied a Bayer Rose Spray, containing Imidacloprid, over the tops of the plants. I allowed a few purple blooms to open, as indicators and applied sticky cards, with intentions of reapplying both pesticides every 5 days for three weeks. It has been only one treatment, and it seems the thrips are gone, but I continue to check those blossoms daily and am prepared to disbud and reapply, until the thrips are gone. I feel my success with eliminating thrips from my collection, with minimal need for continued removal of blooms and applications of more toxic pesticides, underscores the importance of vigilance and early detection, because an advanced infestation would likely be much harder to eliminate and take much longer.

I learned a valuable lesson from my last bout with these insidious plant suckers and I hope this practical advice is heeded and we can stop INSV from

becoming anymore of a plague than it is and prevent thrips from becoming more dangerously resistant to pesticides. After hearing several stories, involving the loss of entire collections to the virus, I cannot imagine growers not taking an active role in preventing its spread. Please be vigilant and proactive in protecting your own and everyone else's collection in preserving this rewarding hobby, by taking measures to keep thrips out of your growing space!

### Bloomin'Now



Barry's *Streptocarpus* 'Blue Ice'



Barry's *Sprekelia*



Barry's *Aeschynanthus lobeatiss*



Andrew's *Chrysothemis puchella* 'Black Flamingo'



Barry's unknown *Columnea*



Barry's Mini *Sinningia*



Barry's *Streptocarpus* 'Butter Blue'



Andrew's *Cobananthus calochlamys*



Barry's *Petrocosmea*



Jim's *Sinningia richii* 'Robeson Lopes'

Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Celena Elegance'



Jim's *Sinningia* 'Magic Moment'



Andrew's *Sinningia* 'YMA'



## Desperately Seeking

<i>Primulina</i>	'Cynthia'	Andrew Norris
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>aurantica</i>	Andrew Norris
<i>Petrocosmea</i>	<i>kerrii</i>	Barb Stewart
<i>Koelikeria</i>	<i>erinoides</i> 'Judy'	Barry Woolf
<i>Kohleria</i>	<i>warszewiczii</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Primulina</i>	'Diane Marie'	Barry Woolf
<i>Tricantha</i>	<i>tricantha dodsonii</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Henckelia</i>	Any variety	Brian Connor
<i>Henckelia</i>	<i>malayana</i>	Brian Connor
<i>Niphimenes</i>	'Lemonade'	Brian Connor
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>lynchii</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Pearcea</i>	<i>hypocyrtifolia</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Gasteranthus</i>	<i>villosus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>multiflora</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Xgloxseemannia</i>	'She's Dancin'	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>zebrina</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Aurora Borealis'	Jim Roberts
<i>Rhytidophyllum</i>	<i>leucomal</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Gesneria</i>	<i>rupincola</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>concinna</i>	Ken Moore
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Li'l Georgie'	Lee Stradley
<i>Saintpaulia</i>	'Optimara Colorado'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Orange Raindrops'	Mike Cagley
<i>Streptocarpus</i>	'Cape Essense'	Mike Cagley

## **National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)** A Chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

"The purpose of the chapter shall be to afford a convenient and beneficial association of persons interested in Gesneriads; to stimulate a widespread interest in the identification, correct nomenclature, culture, and propagation of Gesneriads; and to encourage the origination and introduction of new cultivars."  
(NCAC bylaws, revised April 1981.)

**NCAC meets on the second Saturday** of the month in the Administration Building of the U.S. National Arboretum. For details, please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, the website, or contact one of the people below from the raffle table.

The Gesneriad Society website: [www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)  
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### **Name Error in Last Edition:**

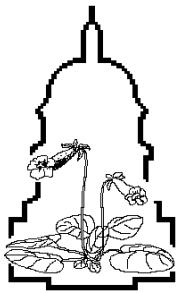


*Saintpaulia* 'Arcturus'



*Saintpaulia* 'Icy Sunset'





# Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of  
The Gesneriad Society

Volume 44 Number 2

February 2013



Barb's Kohleria 'Peridot's Rolo'

## PLAN(T) A DISH GARDEN OR TERRARIUM FOR SHOW By Lee Linett

It isn't too early to plan on entering a terrarium or dish garden in the chapter's show at the end of September. Why start now when there are months to go? In a word, time; time for the plants to fill in and look more like a natural landscape instead of a put-together, last minute arrangement. There always are things to do at the last minute, but starting from scratch shouldn't be one of them.

When terrariums and dish gardens are placed in the show, they're placed at table level, so keep in mind that judges and viewers will be looking down rather than at eye level. It is important to have some "open spaces" from this perspective as well as a front on view. Winding paths and simulated water or streams should continue to a logical source or end and this is where your creative use of rocks, pebbles, and wood comes into play. While your dish garden or terrarium

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#### February 16, 2013

Pest Diagnostics by Andrew Norris

Bring problem plant in a plastic bag.

Little Show Program Barb Stewart will judge

Raffle

#### Meetings for 2013:

March 9      April 13      May 11      September 14  
October 12      December 14

might be viewed from only one side, the whole arrangement should present a completed look all around, front to back and side to side.

If you want to use a piece of wood or a rock as a focal point, try different angles for placement... upside down or vertically instead of horizontally. Several flat rocks can be stepped up to form ledges and overhangs. Pieces of bark, small branches and twigs can be utilized to prop up and hold different levels of plantings. A dish garden or a terrarium will look much more interesting with different levels of plantings.

A lazy susan is a very useful aid in planting a dish garden and will enable you to turn the container to get all around without having to walk around to the other side. Have your materials on the table within easy reach and take your time in arranging. Save the sheet moss for completing the dish garden or terrarium until a week before entry. The reason is to allow for any last minute adjustments with a minimum of disturbance. When you take the moss

out of the package, cut it to roughly the size(s) you'll need to cover the mix and pick off the bits of detritus then soak the moss in room temp water in a shallow pan for 10 minutes. The moss will expand a bit and more detritus will float to the top. Try to skim it off then place the moss on a few layers of paper towels to soak up excess water. Place the moss where you want it and poke the edges down with a thin bamboo skewer. The moss will green up in a couple of days and give a finished look to your arrangement. Give yourself time and plan on making a terrarium or dish garden to grow throughout the spring and summer. Make a diagram or diagrams. You'll have a better idea of what will fit and what is too much.

### **February meeting:**

#### **Pest Diagnostics            by Andrew Norris**

Members bring your plants that need help! Do you have a bug that you cannot identify or that you cannot get rid of? Do you have bugs in your soil? Do you have tight crowns, stippling, leaf curl, blotches on leaves, or any other unusual defects on your plants? Put your problem plant in a plastic sealed bag and you will leave the February meeting with a solution! Andrew will also explain the details involved to distinguish whether the plant has pests or a cultural problem.

#### **Little Show Program        Jim Roberts**

This past month we had an interesting and fun program called a Dog Show. I couldn't believe how many plants showed up. Starting this month we're going to have a show at every meeting. Some of us have been bringing in plants for "Show and Tell." To make the "Show and Tell" program more interesting, we're going to do some actual judging of the plants in the show. And we'll do the judging right out in the open. We don't have three judges at most meetings. However, we'll get by with whoever we can. If I can't get two judges to help, I'll pick two members from the audience. If there are more than 3 plants in the "Show and Tell" I'll select what I feel are the three best to judge. Not all "Show and Tell" plants are necessarily there because they're show quality. Some are there just because they're new and interesting. And if any member doesn't want his / her plant judged we'll put that plant aside.

The best way for us all to know what judges are looking for in a show plant is to openly discuss the show plants so that you can hear our comments just as a clerk would hear the judges' comments in the judging of a "real" show. One Blue, one Red and one Yellow ribbon will be awarded every month. The person who wins the most Blue ribbons between February and December 2013 will get 5 free plants from the Propagation Committee table at the end of the year in December. Since temps in February are generally cool I don't want us to risk warmth living plants. So how about this for the February group: terrarium Gesneriads; small growing plants that like higher humidity. Examples would be mini *Sinningias*, *Gesneria*, or small rhizomatous plants such as *Phinaea*, *Diastema*, *Amalophyllon*.

### **Bloomin' Now**



**Blooming for Kenneth Moore**

Kenneth has photos of his *Sinningia defoliata* blooming. He bought it at the 2011 NCAC's September show at Behnke's and kept it outside near front door (kind of under bushes) all summer. When the leaf came off in late fall, he noticed the inflorescence and was super excited! He crossed pollinated by hand with one of the flowers and used the pollen from *Sinningia reitzii*. He is hoping something interesting grows from the future seeds!



Another view of Kenneth's plant



Leaf damage on Barb's plant



*Ask Mr. Gesneriad*

Question from Barb:

I would like to know what might have caused this kind of damage on an otherwise healthy looking *Streptocarpus* plant. No pests are visible on the plant.



Another view of the *Streptocarpus*

### Mr. Gesneriad

It is difficult to tell from the photos but there is a possibility that the plant has been in a drafty area like a window or has had a heat burn from being near a heat duct. The problem looks like it may be confined to one side of the plant. It could also be fungal (mildew) if the plant is very closed to other plants and is missing out on air circulation. My suggestion would be to bring it to the meeting for closer examination and a discussion to help figure the problem out.





Photos of the “Dog Show” in January 2013

## The NCAC Propagation Committee

The Propagation Committee has been busy potting up seedlings and buying starter plants for our members. Beginning sometime during 2013 NCAC meetings there will be a selection of plants available for sale. Pricing will be in the \$2.00 to \$4.00 range, depending upon the rarity of the plant material and the time it took to grow the plant. In all cases, the prices of the plants on our on the Propagation Table cost less than if they were bought from any commercial vendor out there. They may not be as large, but they’ll be

healthy starts that any of us will be able to grow on to show plants. The committee expects to see a profit of \$1.50 to \$3.50 per plant, which will be returned to the fund to buy new plants for further propagation.

Jim Roberts just spent a bundle on new plant material. Much more than the club has authorized (his good judgment is not really authorized!). Cuttings will be started of these new plants and will show up on the Propagation Table over the next few months. Jim has tried to find plants that he has not seen show up on the Raffle Table, including plants which add new plant material to all of our collections. The Committee will also be starting a number of plants to sell at the September show. Profits made from these sales will go into the Chapter’s general fund.

As you visit various nurseries, or order new plant material for your own personal collection, please remember the Propagation Committee. New plant material will always be welcome. And if you have room to help us grow plants on for sale, let us know so that we can share what we’re doing.

## Propagation: Techniques for getting more from your collection by Andrew Norris

Having been an avid grower of several genera of gesneriads for nearly 5 years, I heard the word ‘propagation’ and I immediately thought of asexual or vegetative reproduction of plants. While many people recall the mechanics of sexual plant production, where the pollen from one flower fertilizes the pistil of another and seeds are formed; where violets are concerned, it is not possible to obtain an exact replica of a variety in this familiar fashion. How then, does one go about getting more of their favorite African violet? The following are some methods of getting exact duplicates of your most desired varieties.

### Leaf Propagation:

Leaves are the most common and productive means of getting exact copies of your favorite violet. With few exceptions, the humble leaf contains all of the genetic information and ability to form a new, identical plant. A leaf should not be too old, but is

best taken from the third row out from the growing center or crown of the plant. A plant with more rows of leaves may have perfectly viable leaves in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> rows, but the last and largest row is typically the oldest and will not be as productive as younger leaves. Immature or "baby" leaves are said to often give you only one or two, but very strong plantlets, so may also be used. Simply remove the leaf as close to the stem of the violet as possible. I find using my index finger to follow the petiole (leaf stem) to where it meets the neck or stem of the violet and pressing downward from above gives a clean break. Sometimes a gentle pull to one side or scissors may be needed to avoid damaging other leaves.

Once you have removed your leaf, cut the petiole down to about an inch in length and at an angle. This allows the most contact with the rooting media and moisture that the leaf will need to root. I like to put the leaf in a bowl of tepid water with a few drops of 'Super Thrive' and allow it to soak, but this optional. If you obtained your leaves from a friend or a vendor, it is always a good idea to make a fresh cut at the end of the leaf stem and give the leaf a soak. Even a wilted leaf can be revived in this way and go on to produce new plants. 'Super Thrive' is a product containing vitamins said to help with rooting and general plant health. No rooting powders or hormones are recommended, because often you end up with a leaf putting out lots of roots and no new plants. If your petiole is broken, the leaf can still be saved by cutting away part of the leaf, nearest the lost petiole, and in essence a new petiole is formed by the exposed midrib of the leaf. Some like to remove the top third of the leaf or trim the top and sides of the leaf to fit the available space some believe this speeds up rooting as well. I will remove the top of the leaf on a reluctant leaf, that has failed to produce or has been seen to continue growing in size, but prefer not to remove the top initially.

While your leaf is soaking, choose a container to root it in. The smaller and shallower the container, the faster the leaf will fill the available space with roots and send up new plants. A favorite among growers is the plastic solo cups. Punch a hole or several holes in the bottom for drainage and label the cup with the date and the name of the variety you are propagating. Never neglect to label your cups, before potting the leaves or you will learn how inadequate the human memory can be! There are several materials one can

use for rooting leaves in. Leaves will root in seed starting mix, your usual violet mix, perlite, vermiculite, sphagnum moss, or a suitable combination of the above. Leaves will root in plain water, but lose the roots formed in the water, once potted in soil and are best started in some solid media from the start. My preference is to root leaves in my usual potting mix, perhaps lightened a bit with additional perlite. I do utilize sphagnum moss for treasured or more difficult varieties.

You are now ready to pot up the leaf. For smaller leaves, I simply fill the cup 1/3 to 1/2 full of my chosen media, moisten the media to saturation of a wrung out sponge (barely damp), and tap the cup lightly on a surface to settle the mix, but never pack it down. Now, gently press the petiole into the mix, up to the base of the leaf. For larger leaves, I will place a small amount of mix in the bottom of the cup and hold onto the leaf, while spooning mix around the petiole. This provides the best possible situation for the leaf to be supported and held upright. Hair pins, floral wire, tooth picks, and the like can be used to hold a leaf in place.

Once potted, the leaves will need a humid atmosphere, for best production. A plastic bag sealed and inflated with air, will do for one or a few small leaves. Various clamshell type containers, used for pastries, salads, and readymade foods are perfectly adaptable for this purpose. The container need only be large enough to accommodate the leaves, clear to allow in light and to see the progress of the leaves, without disturbing them or letting the humidity escape, and sealed well enough to prevent desiccation of the leaves. Remember, the leaves, at this stage, have no roots for absorbing water, so are only able to stay hydrated by absorbing water from the humid air, through the leaf.

Place the sealed container in a warm, bright location. Leaves need less light to root than actively growing plants, but a bright location will give the best results. I like the top shelf of the light stand, for warmth, but the top of a well-lit kitchen refrigerator, or similar location will yield results. The leaves will need little to no care, while they root. Checking them one a week to ensure none have dried out and adding a few drops or a tablespoon of water as needed is all. Often this is never required, since the humidity is high enough so the potting mix never dries out. Keep an eye out for and remove any leaves that turn moldy,

black, or become mush. This is not cause for concern and is something we all see from time to time, though a 98% success rate is not hard to achieve with rooting leaves.

From here, you can expect that the leaves will begin to produce roots after a week or 2 in the mix and then fill the cup with roots within a month or two, and new plants should begin to appear within 6-8 weeks. These are not hard rules, as cooler temperatures slow the process and some varieties take longer than others, for example those with white, pink, or yellow patterns, or variegation in the leaves. Try to take the leaf showing as much as green as possible from these varieties, so that enough chlorophyll (the green parts of the plant cells) is present to provide the leaf with a strong start. As long as the leaf is green and turgid, it still has the potential to bring about new life.

There is little you can do for a reluctant leaf. Squeezing or banging the cup sharply on a hard surface to disturb the roots is said to work. Removing the top 1/3 of the leaf, or adding a few drops of fertilizer, such as fish emulsion or 1/8-1/16 a teaspoon per gallon of your usual fertilizer may help. Otherwise, try a brighter or warmer location, being careful not to "cook" the leaves in a sunny window, and let nature take its course.

When the new plants are large enough to handle comfortably for you or have leaves as large as the American dime, they can be gently teased away from the mother leaf with a tooth pick, by gently uprooting the whole leaf. Resist the urge to pot up every baby, keeping only the strongest 3 or so, as you will find, some leaves are quite generous. Leaves can be cut and set down to root a second time, if more plants are desired. Remove any tiny or unhealthy leaves from the young plant, leaving 3 of the largest leaves intact. Pot the new babies in your usual violet mix and give them a sealed environment, as you did the leaves for a week or 2, to establish themselves, then slowly expose them to room air, opening the container or bag a little more each day, until fully open at about a week. Treat them as you would a full sized plant, and begin fertilizing as you normally would. Expect to see your first blooms in 3-6 months and to achieve a show-worthy specimen in about 1 year. Repotting the new plants every few months and removing immature leaves from the plants will speed things up considerably. Leaves are amazing in their simplicity

and their ability to be manipulated into bringing about lots of new material to grow and share.

### Suckers:

Using suckers another way of reproducing your favorite plants and is very fast. Suckers are small plants, usually without their own roots, seen as a cluster of leaves between the leaf axils of established plants. In the case of chimera (pinwheel colored flowers), suckers are one of only two ways to reproduce exact copies of the plant, the other being bloom stalk propagation, covered later. Suckers are also valuable ways to get some fantasy (splashes or spots of a different color over a background of another color) varieties to come true, where leaves only yield solid color blossoms. I find spotted or puff fantasy typically successful with leaves, where suckers are desirable in case of streaking type fantasy, though sometimes leaves will work as well. *Saintpaulia* 'Live Wire' is an example of a fantasy variety that seldom comes true from leaves. Suckers are most often removed on sight for the dedicated show grower, because they destroy the plant's symmetry and rob the main crown of energy for blooming. Suckers are normal and encouraged on trailing varieties and are considered to be crowns in this case. In some cases, as in the chimera, suckers are desired and are encouraged by removing the top of the plant (crown), putting the decapitated crown down to roots and allowing the remaining roots and stump to produce suckers. Rooting suckers is fairly straight forward. Allow them to grow to a



manageable size and using a dull pencil, clay working tool, paring knife, or similar implement, pop the sucker from the main stem, as close to the stem as possible, trying to keep the sucker intact. Pot the sucker up, as you would a small plant, separated from a leaf, and treat the same, allowing 4-6 weeks for it to form roots, before exposing it to room air. Once rooted and growing in the open, treat as you do your other plants and expect a show plant in as little as 6 months.

## **Rooting Crowns:**

Crowns are only removed from trailers and chimeras, as a rule. On occasion, a plant may need to be restarted from a crown, after cultural problem or disease destroys the roots. A crown is removed by cutting through the main stem of a single crowned violet or the ‘branch’ of a trailing one. Remove all but the first three leaves in the crown and set the bare stem into the mix to just below the crown and treat as you would a sucker or leaf cutting. If the crown came from a diseased plant, be sure to remove any mushy or brown material and cut away the diseased portions, until you reach the healthy, cream colored tissue, seen in the middle of the stem. In these cases, the application of a fungicide may be desired, either sprayed on the material or as a powder you can dip the stem into, before rooting. Expect a blooming plant is as little as 2 months, even immediately in the case of trailers and a show plant within 3-6 months.

## **Blossom Stem Cuttings:**

Bloom stem cuttings are one of only two ways to get chimera and some fantasy violets to come true to their color pattern. Bloom stems are somewhat less successful and harder to root than other material, but bloom stalks that have the largest, tiny leaves, below the blooms are your best bet. If you know you are going to try bloom stem propagation, remove the blossoms from the bloom stem, before they open and allow the tiny leaves, if present, to grow larger. After a week or two, remove the bloom stems and cut the bottom of them stem at an angle, leaving about an inch in total length. It is at the joint, right below the tiny leaves that you will hope to get roots. There is a rooting gel product, called ‘Keiki Grow’ that is used by orchid growers and has been said to be successful with bloom stem propagation. As far as I am aware, you use a sewing needle to lightly scratch the gel into the stem, right at this joint, to promote rooting and plantlet formation. This method also works, while leaving the stem on the plant, but removing the flower buds is still advisable. If you are using soil mix, pot them up and treat them as you did the leaf cuttings. Expect a longer time for the bloom stem to produce babies. An alternate method of rooting blossom stems is to float them in water, by sticking them through a piece of Styrofoam or by rooting in floral oasis. Once roots are seen in the floating cuttings, they should be potted into traditional mix and treated like rooting leaf cuttings.

## **Bucket Plants:**

Bucket plants are uncommon, but are essentially suckers that form on the blossom stems. They can be left on the plant, until blooming has ceased and then potted up and treated like a traditional sucker.

## **Growing from seed:**

While we don’t get true varieties from seed, seed is still a fun and exciting way to grow new plants and get new varieties. Many people order viable seed from the internet and plant seeds for the fun of experiencing the unknown. Hybridizers, both hobbyist and professional alike, essentially are sowing for the unknown, but in this case, they have an idea of what they hope to see, based on the chosen parents. I won’t list the sets of dominant and recessive genes here, but a Google search will yield this information, for those interested. Pollinating a violet is a simple matter. Once the perspective parents are chosen, you want to replot the mother plant. Once in bloom, you want to pollinate the mother plant within 3 to 7 days of the plant’s flowers opening. Pollen is best harvested when the anthers have dried, about a week after opening and can be stored for months in a refrigerator. Using a jewelry tag, label the bloom stem with the date and the cross to prevent it from being accidentally removed. Choosing a flower from the father or donor plant that has been open for about a week, use a needle to slit the anther open and tap some of the powdery pollen onto a clean sheet of paper. Using a soft brush transfer the pollen to the sticky end of the pistol on the mother plant bloom. The base of the flower or ovary will begin to swell within days of successful pollination and the resulting seed pod will be left in place for approximately 4-9 months, until it has dried. Once dried, the seed pod is removed and either stored in the refrigerator and labeled or sowed immediately. Sow the seed by creasing a sheet of white paper and gently opening the pod onto it. Tap the tiny seed into the crease and use the paper to lightly disperse the seed over a moist bed of seed starter or violet mix, without fertilizer. Do not cover the seed with soil mix. Cover the seed, like you do cuttings and place in a warm, bright location, such as the top shelf of the light stand or a bright spot in the warmer rooms in your house. Sprouts will appear as tiny green specks in as little as a week and in as long as month. As the seedlings grow, replot clumps of seedlings into small pots, and continue separating

them further as they grow, beginning to fertilize once they have been potted individually. You can expect seed grown plants to give you an adult plant within about a year.

**Other Gesneriads:**

Many gesneriads can be propagated in the same way as violets mentioned above. As many ways as violets make available to propagate them, gesneriads offer a few more.

**Stolons:** Stolons are small plants formed along runners, like a strawberry plant. Examples of plants that are easily reproduced by rooting stolons are *Alsobia* and *Episcias*. The stolons can be removed and treated like African Violet suckers or be pegged down, still attached to the mother plant in the same pot or a smaller pot and tucked into potting mix. The stolon should be ready to grow on its own within 2 weeks, when it can be treated like the adult plant.

**Scaly Rhizomes:**

Plants such as *Kohlerias* and *Smithiantha*, and *Achimenes*, make worm-like structures, called rhizomes. These rhizomes are actually densely packed, modified leaves, which help the plant survive adverse conditions. The scaly rhizomes are very much like the familiar bulbs of daffodils, tulips, and onions, in form and function. The most productive way to get plants from these structures is my scaling. By taking the rhizome and rubbing between the fingers, over damp potting mix, you will distribute numerous scales, each capable of growing a new plant! Treat the planted scales like violet seed, expecting to see plants in about 2 weeks. This is a very fast way of getting numerous plants. Alternately, the rhizomes can be potted up, an inch below the potting mix and kept in a warm location, barely moist, until growth is seen, then placed in it permanent location and treated like an adult plant.

**Air layering:**

Air layering is used on woody stems and involves binding a wad of moist sphagnum moss around a joint in the stem. The stem is lightly scoured and the moss secured with a rubber band and plastic wrap, until roots are visible under the plastic. The plant can then be removed from the parent and potted up. It is

best to cover the newly potted plant for extra humidity for a few weeks, and then wean it as described for leaf cuttings, to room air. *Beslerias* and *Drymonia* are examples of plants that can be reproduced in this way.

**Stem cuttings:**

Stem cuttings are essentially crown cuttings and are often used in trailing plants, such as *Columnneas* and tuberous plants, like *Sinningias*. The stem is removed and the leaves stripped off, to the point of a node or joint in the stem. The node is buried in potting mix and the cutting treated like a leaf cutting, until rooting and growth is evident. The cutting can then be treated like an adult plant and will function as such in short order.

I have provided the here the basics for reproducing your African Violets and Gesneriads and hope to see your success at the next club swap, sales table, and hopefully, grown to grace out show tables with blue ribbon winners!

**Desperately Seeking**

<i>Primulina</i>	'Cynthia'	Andrew Norris
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>aurantica</i>	Andrew Norris
<i>Petrocosmea</i>	<i>kerrii</i>	Barb Stewart
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>lynchii</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Pearcea</i>	<i>hypocyrtifolia</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>zebrina</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>multiflora</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Drymonia</i>	First Peach'	Jim Roberts
<i>Lysionotus</i>	<i>serratus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>capitatus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>cutucuensis</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>mettittfolia</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>picturatus</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>concinna</i>	Ken Moore
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Li'l Georgie'	Lee Stradley
<i>Saintpaulia</i>	'Optimara Colorado'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Orange Raindrops'	Mike Cagley
<i>Streptocarpus</i>	'Cape Essense'	Mike Cagley
If you have an DS for Jim, bring to March meeting as he will not be attending 2/16		



## National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

### A Chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

"The purpose of the chapter shall be to afford a convenient and beneficial association of persons interested in Gesneriads; to stimulate a widespread interest in the identification, correct nomenclature, culture, and propagation of Gesneriads; and to encourage the origination and introduction of new cultivars."

(NCAC bylaws, revised April 1981.)

**NCAC meets on the second Saturday** of the month in the Administration Building of the U.S. National Arboretum. For details, please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, the website, or contact one of the people below.

The Gesneriad Society website: [www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)  
NCAC website: [www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org](http://www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org)  
NCAC Blog: <http://dcgesneriads.blogspot.com/>  
Website & Blog: Kyoko Imai  
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Directors: Andrew Norris, Kyoko Imai, Donna Beverin

Committees:

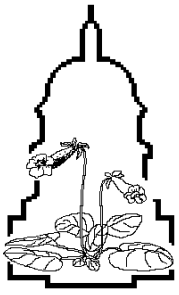
Hospitality: Lee Linett  
Membership: Kyoko Imai  
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**Membership dues reminder:** \$10 per household

Barry Woolf, NCAC Treasurer  
1301 Malus Court, Fallston, MD 21047 or bring to meeting.



# Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society

Volume 44 Number 3

March 2013



Barb's *Primulina* 'Aiko'

## March Program

### Propagation Techniques

Our March meeting will be a Propagation Workshop. This yearly activity creates excitement for all members and visitors. It is exciting to revisit all the ways to propagate gesneriads and have an abundance of plants to share with other members! Unfortunately the Arboretum may require us to pre-register just to get through the gates, which takes away our ability to invite the public in for some free take-always. At the workshop Jim will have 3 tables or stations set up where we can rotate every 20 minutes.

- Station 1 will demonstrate seed propagation, including all stages from setting seed to planting and dividing.

NCAC meetings are held at the National Arboretum.

Doors open at 9:30am with the meeting starting at 10:00am on the second Saturday of the month.

Saturday, March 9, 2013 Same room in trailer at arboretum  
Propagation by Jim Roberts

Little Show Program: Bring a Show & Tell plant and our judges will score your plant and give you tips!

Meetings for 2013: April 13

May 11

September 14

October 12

December 14

- Station 2 will demonstrate how to take cuttings properly. Leaf and stem cuttings will be explained using some interesting plant material.
- Station 3 will be devoted to rhizomes and tubers, sharing the special ways these plants can be propagated and shared.

Everyone will go home with some plant material from every station. If you have a problem plant that you need advice on how to propagate it, bring it in. And if you have seeds, seedlings, baby plants, tubers, rhizomes or other gesneriads please bring in to share. Let's hope that we don't have to pre-register to enter the arboretum grounds on Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, so that the public plant enthusiasts can join in and learn about the varieties of Gesneriads plants for which we all share a love and how to propagate them! Can't wait!



Petrosimonsia propagating itself as it was growing in a small glass globe with water in the bottom. They are very easy to propagate by leaf cuttings also.



*Nematanus albus* seedpod



Bloomin' Now for Andrew: *Saintpaulia* 'Lyon's Lavender Magic'



Barb's *Primulina* 'Souvenir'



Johanna's *Columnea* 'Hot Lips'



Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Rebel's Splatter Kake'

Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Magnolia' →



Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Fancy Nights'



Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Optimara EverPrecious'





Andrew's *Gesneria* 'Ako Cardinal Flight'



Andrew's *Columnnea* 'Midget'



Andrew's *Saintpaulia* 'Ian Minuet'



Andrew's *Columnnea* 'Apollo'



When I tried to pick up this unnamed *Sinningia* off the shelf, it wouldn't budge. After looking more closely, I found it was wrapped around the fluorescent tube. I had to take out the tube to get the plant unwound. Then I discovered the double tuber at the base. -Barb

## Brazil Plants – A Visit with Mauro

by Jim Roberts reprinted with permission from March 2009

One of the perks of my job is getting to travel to different parts of the world. In 2009 my company decided to hold its international sales meeting at a resort in Salvador, Brazil. A really nice place to visit but not nearly as enjoyable for me as the three days I was able to spend with Mauro Peixoto at his home outside of São Paulo.

Mauro is a very gracious host, and was able to arrange his schedule so that we could spend three glorious days hunting down gesneriads. I took a bus from São Paulo to Moji das Cruzes after my last business meeting on Friday. Mauro picked me up at the bus station and we went out to dinner. It had been a long day of meetings for me so after dinner we went back to his place, chatted



for awhile and I went to bed early. The weather on Saturday was very much like what São Paulo had been experiencing for the previous two weeks: cloudy, drizzly, very warm and humid. Because of the threat of rain, we decided to limit that day's travels to a farm close to where Mauro lived. The owner of the farm is working at converting it to a sanctuary where plants and animals native to the region could be protected. We got to the farm only to find that the owners were not home. On our way out, after having passed once again over a plank bridge, we met up with the owners on their way back home. The farm had some nice walking paths through the woods and along the stream, but there weren't many gesneriads to be found; however, there were lots of bromeliads, begonias, orchids and

other highly desirable house plants for us up here in the Northlands. We did find some *N. fritchii* and some *C. devosiana*. I also slipped once on the side of the stream and almost went in (lots of mud on the back of my jeans and shirt) and walked into a mud pit along the path where I sank in to the tops of my waterproof sneakers and ran about 10 feet to get to dry ground before it went over the tops of my sneakers. Luckily Mauro knew what the conditions would be like and we had come in his truck. On Sunday Mauro wanted to take me to see some better plants. There is a mountain about 2½ hours from his house. I forget if it's the second tallest peak in São Paulo state or in Brazil, but the peak was just a little over 6000 feet. On our way up, we



*Nematantus fritchii*

stopped along the road to photograph some *S. magnifica* and *S. allagophylla*. The *S. magnifica* was growing among and between rocks whereas the *S. allagophylla* was growing in an area that seemed to support more plant variety. Mauro told me that the *S. allagophylla* had been in full bloom a few weeks earlier, but what we saw were mostly red-orange stalks with just a few, if any, open flowers and lots of unripe seed pods.



*Sinningia magnifica*

We passed numerous large hotels and guest houses on the way up. The peak is a popular winter resort where they actually get a little snow in the winter. Just before getting to the top Mauro pulled into a dirt parking area on the side of the road and told me that this is where we would find the better plants of *S. magnifica*. Walking over the wet, moss-covered rocks going down the hill by the side of the road was a little slow. One misstep would have hurt a lot, and I was already nursing a fractured wrist and a large gash on my leg held together with a dozen stitches.

The plants really were magnificent. All different sizes, some as individual plants while others seemed to be colonies with multiple tubers. Stepping down off a rock to get a better shot of one small cluster I stepped on some very soft earth. While getting ready to take the shot I felt a lot of something on my foot. I looked down and

discovered that the soft earth was in reality a fire-ant nest. My entire sneaker, sock and leg, up to the top of the bandage around the stitches was covered with ants. Needless to say, I wasn't as slow getting up the hill a bit as I was when I went



*Sinningia allagophylla*

better condition than those on the other side. And no ants! On our way back down the mountain we stopped by some woods where Mauro knew that there was some *N. fornix*. Nothing in flower but I did manage to snap a photo of one in bud. Then Mauro spotted a *S. douglasii* up in a tree. We were looking at a large *Rhipsalis* and higher up in the tree was the tuber of *S. douglasii*, covered in moss and lichen and with seed pods to boot. We

down. A lot of swatting and brushing took care of the problem. Had to take the shoe off and even the sock to get them all, but I survived. When we got to the top I asked Mauro if there were any on the other side of the road. He had never been down that way. Sure enough, at just about the same distance down this side of the hill, there were large plants of *S. magnifica*. In fact much larger and in



*Sinningia douglasii*

missed the flowering, but I was at last able to see that, yes, some *Sinningia* are indeed epiphytic. Monday we went to the beach. Not to swim, but to find some plants that a friend of Mauro's had sent him a picture of and a location. The picture looked like *S. aggregata* but this was a new location for it. Mauro had the GPS coordinates



*Sinningia aggregata*

for it, and we were able to park on the street within 100 yards of the rocks where the plants were growing. They were *S. aggregata*, and a very nice clone at that. Mauro collected some seeds and a good sized tuber. Here I saw why my *Sinningia* were probably less hurt by the salt water problem in my house than some of the other genera. Here were plants growing and thriving on bare rocks within 15 or 20 feet of the ocean. We stopped at a couple other locations on the coast that day, saw more *N. fritschii*, *C. devosiana*, and *C. gracilis*, and headed back for some rest before my long flight home.

I spent hours each day in Mauro's greenhouse taking pictures and hearing stories about some of the plants. I went through his seed collection on the last day and made sure I got packets of everything that we had seen in the wild. If you're ever in Sao Paulo, or plan to be down that way, get in touch with Mauro. The work he is doing to preserve and share not just gesneriads, but many different types of Brazilian plants is amazing. He is a truly special individual.



*Codonanthe gracilis*



*Codonanthe devosiana*



## Desperately Seeking

<i>Primulina</i>	'Cynthia'	Andrew Norris
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>aurantica</i>	Andrew Norris
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>lynchii</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Pearcea</i>	<i>hypocyrtilifolia</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>zebrina</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>multiflora</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Drymonia</i>	First Peach'	Jim Roberts
<i>Lysionotus</i>	<i>serratus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>capitatus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>cutucuensis</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>mettittifolia</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>picturatus</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Li'l Georgie'	Lee Stradley
<i>Saintpaulia</i>	'Optimara Colorado'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Orange Raindrops'	Mike Cagley
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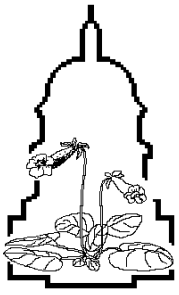
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# Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society

Volume 44 Number 5

May 2013



Ki's *Sinningia pusilla* 'White Sprite' Yes, the photo is the right way up. Ki has had it growing on a tree fern mount for several years now.

## President's Message

Hi all! I have some good and unfortunately some not so good news to share this month. First, some good news; at least for this month, we will be meeting at the Arboretum at 10 AM. For our ongoing not so good, since the arboretum has not finalized a policy, we are still "up in the air" about future meetings and our Fall Show. At a recent meeting, some of you had suggested alternate sites for our Fall Show. Would you please investigate further and get prices and availability for the end of September, beginning of October. Please forward to me within the next two weeks: CEwickliffe@gmail.com.

NCAC meetings are held at the National Arboretum.

Doors open at 10:00am with the meeting starting at 10:30am on the second Saturday of the month.

Saturday, May 11, 2013 Artistic Design Entries in Gesneriad Shows by Jim Roberts

Little Show Program: Bring a Show & Tell plant and our judges will score your plant and give you tips!

Meetings for 2013: June 8            September 14  
October 12                          December 14

For more "Very Good to Excellent, This month's program will help prepare us for our fall show. Jim Roberts will explain & demonstrate how to not only enter, but do well and win ribbons with "Artistic" entries.

We also have a new project! Ken Meier had donated several trays of gesneriads (many, many, many African Violets) for us to work with. While a lot of these plants will be on the raffle table, others will be available for members to take home to keep. It is Ken's and our hope that members will start new plants from his and that these new plants will show up on the sales table at our Fall Show. Thanks Ken.

Unfortunately, I will be out of State for the May meeting, but I am confident that it will be a good meeting with a great program and members should be able to take home many new plants.

I'm looking forward to seeing all of you in June.  
Corey

## Gesneriad of the Month: *Achimenes*

-Barbara Stewart

Spring is finally here, and my *Achimenes* are coming out of dormancy. I have two showing signs of life: *A.* 'Harry Winston' which seems to be an upright form and *A.* 'Purple Prince' which looks like it will be more of a hanging basket type.



Pot of dry *Achimenes* rhizomes

There are about 25 species of *Achimenes* which are rhizomatous plants found primarily in Central America, particularly Mexico. They grow in tropical rain forests with partial sunlight and moist conditions, such as wet rocks and shaded banks near streams.



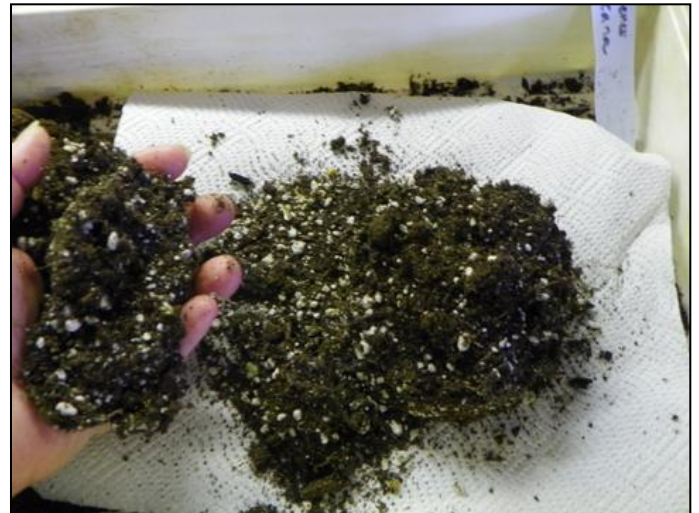
Cut back the dry surface dead leaves

To survive the dry season, they produce rhizomes and go dormant until wet conditions return. Because of their trailing nature, they are often grown in hanging baskets for the summer. They have been in cultivation in England since 1778, and were first described as early as 1636.



Dump out the dried soil with rhizomes

There are many hybrids with a wide selection of colors, as well as a number of successful inter-generic crosses with *Smithiantha*, *Eucadonia*, and *Niphaea*.



Gently separate the dry soil to find the rhizomes

Like most gesneriads, *Achimenes* grow best in well drained soil. They need to be kept moist through the growing season. If they dry out, they may go into dormancy prematurely without having formed rhizomes and your plant will be lost. They will bloom through the summer, and begin to go dormant

when the daylight gets shorter. After the plants have gone dormant, growers either take the rhizomes out of the pot and store in dry vermiculite or leave the rhizomes in the pot until plants begin to grow



White rhizomes

again in the spring. Having lost rhizomes that were stored in bags, I now leave mine in the pot on my shelves where get a little water every now and



You will find a lot of rhizomes

then. In the late winter or spring, rhizomes can be planted horizontally or vertically (with the growing tip up) and covered with about an inch of soil. The challenge is to arrange them evenly in the pot so as to get a good form. Some growers use a time release

fertilizer, but mine get the usual constant feed method.



Packet of *Achimenes* 'Cattleya'

My A. 'Harry Winston' has large rhizomes at the very bottom of the pot and erect stems with about 3 inches between nodes. I replanted it into a larger



*Achimene* 'Harry Winston' growing on matting

pot without disturbing the rhizomes using the "mold potting" technique, as they were all lying on top of each other with large sprouts. Some rhizomes are



still sprouting below the soil surface. Then I cut back several of the larger stems to either the first or second node to see what will happen. The sprouts are not evenly distributed, but it doesn't look like a good time to move them around



right now. Maybe next winter I will dig them up and work on a better arrangement before they sprout. For now, I will see how they grow and perhaps repot in a couple of months if all is going well. My biggest challenge will be keeping the soil moist, so I will keep my *Achimenes* on wicking tubs so they won't succumb to my "feast or famine" routine. I don't know what either of my *Achimenes* will look like when the bloom (but I assume 'Purple Prince' will be



Sergie Saliba

purple), so I am looking forward to seeing how they progress. Hopefully, I will have pictures in a future issue of *Petal Tones*. Meanwhile, I would love to hear from anyone who has grown either of these hybrids and get some advice on growing them well. For more information on how others grow *Achimenes*, check the *Gesneriads* magazine second

quarter 2008 and the *Gloxinian* first quarter 1996 and second quarter 1996.

The Baltimore African Violet & Gesneriad Club

Annual Pre-Mother's Day Sale and Show  
Excellent plants for show and sale! Great gifts!

The Shops at Kenilworth, 800 Kenilworth Drive,  
Towson, Maryland (Right inside the door you  
will see the displays in the mall)

Friday, May 11<sup>th</sup> Show: 1-7

Sale: 9-7

Saturday, May 12<sup>th</sup> Show & Sale: 9-5

Bloomin' Now



*Sinningia speciosa* 'Peridot's Darth Vader' by Andrew Norris



Long Island Show: Best in Show to Ben Paternoster's *Sinningia bullata* Photo by Jim Roberts



Kenneth Moore's *Primulina* 'Gotham'



Andrew's *Aeschynanthus xSplendidus*



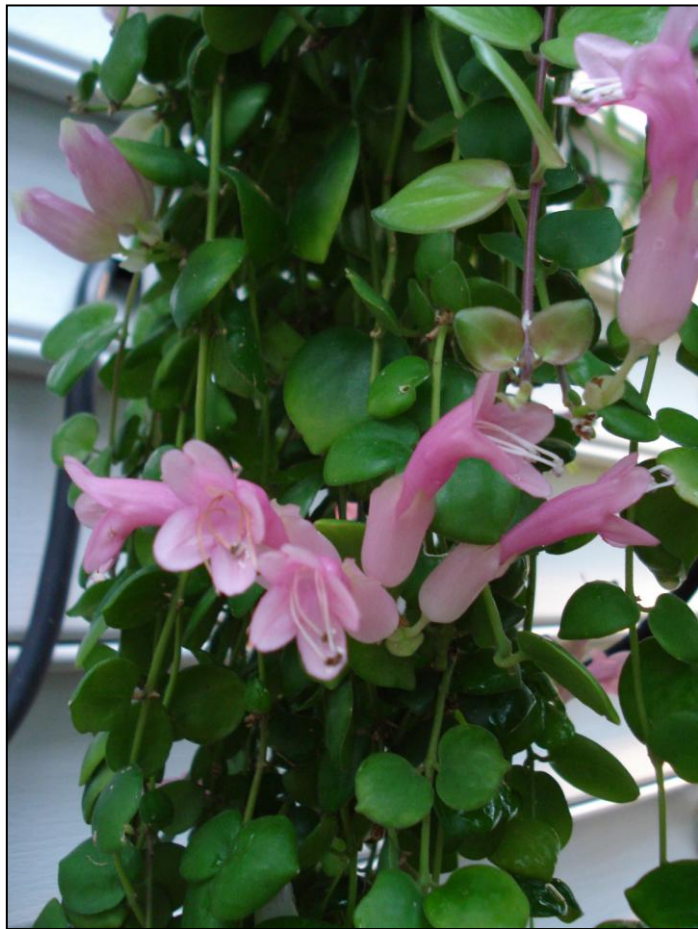
Long Island Show: Ben Paternoster's *Sinningia cardinalis* 'Redcoat', an old time goodie. Photo: Jim Roberts



*Aeschynanthus* 'Thai Pink' close up



Johanna's *Columnea*  
'Janelle'



Johanna's *Aeschynanthus* 'Thai Pink'

## Message from Mauro

Our seeds have not arrived yet but here is some news:

Friends,

First of all, I want to apologize for not uploading the seed list before, but as I didn't have practically any new seeds to post, I preferred to wait until today. That doesn't mean that we (Renato, Sergio and I) haven't been working hard...and working hard means literally "hard work". We just finished the internal part of the Greenhouse extension, relocated exactly 456 plants to the new place and we are currently working on the front of it. We had to move the pathway to the door, we moved two big containers that had some carnivorous plants and *Epidendrum* orchids and planted them with Lotus (*Nelumbus nucifera*). We also had to rearrange some plant beds and now we have to fill up the empty spaces with grass. We hope to finish the front by next Friday and after that I will resume the plant inventory and the boys will start repotting the plants, especially the *Nematanthus* and *Codonanthe* that are badly needing it.

I have been in two trips since my last message:

The first one was with two members and also very good friends: Bill Price and Dave Zaitlin. We went to Rio de Janeiro State, more specifically in Rezende, Buzios, and Cardoso Moreira area. The trip's goal was to find different varieties of *Sinningia speciosa*, and we had 100% of success. I particularly liked the new variety from Resende because it was found near a waterfall receiving all the mist without any signs of rotting of fungus.

The second trip was with Carl Schoenfeld, another good friend and his sister, who was visiting Brazil for the first time. This trip was more "tourist oriented", but of course we chose the places where we could find good both nice scenery and plants. We went to Rio de Janeiro, Espirito Santo and Minas Gerais States. It is useless to say that I brought back dozens of plants from both trips. During this week I will try to upload some pictures from both trips and Greenhouse.

Thank you again for the continuous support

Mauro

## Pinching: What, Where, How, and When to Pinch Your Plants

By: Andrew Norris

Pinching is a technique that, as the name implies, often involves using the index finger and thumb to remove portions of a plant to encourage the plant grow in a more pleasing manner. A common site of pinching is the crown or apical bud of a plant. By removing the center of growth, the plant is directed by its own hormones, to put out new, often lateral growth. There are many plants and many ways that apply this technique will help you get show winning plants.

A great many gesneriads and probably some in every genus can be pinched in some way. Most common targets are *Sinningias*, *Kohlerias*, *Saintpaulia*, *Episcias*, *Columnea*, *Nematanthus*, *Alsobia*, and intergenerics. An easy way to know whether a plant will respond well to pinching is to determine if the plant already has multiple growing points, such as stolons, branching stems, or multiple crowns. Take a look at *Sinningia leucitricha* vs. *Sinningia* 'Prudence Risley'. The former, may have multiple growth points from the tuber, but the growth itself does not branch or for lateral shoots, so no pinching is recommended, while *Sinningia* 'Prudence Risley' readily produces lateral shoots, so removing the tallest growing point will allow the other growth, along the stem to mature, giving you a more compact, full, and floriferous plant. This is the most basic example of pinching.

Another form of pinching does not involve removing the growing point, but simply removing leaves that shade lateral growth. An example of this could be a *Kohleria*, which while generally will respond to the technique mentioned above, may do just as well, if the plant already shows lateral growth, with the removal of a few leaves. By removing the leaves that are shading the lateral shoots, I can keep the central growing point, but also promote a fuller plant, by getting light and energy to those lateral shoots. When the growth is even, the plant can be potted lower, to where the lateral shoots originate from the main stem, thus giving you a compact, floriferous, and stable plant, that isn't too tall, top heavy, or showing bare stems.



With trailing or stoloniferous plants, there are a couple of typed of pinching that work well. With *Alsobia* and *Episcias*, the removal of stolons allows the plant to direct energy into the main crown and that crown will grow larger, fuller, and have more flowers. Once the crown reaches the desired size, a few stolons (2 or 3) can be allowed to grow, be tucked into the same pot, and have the same technique applied, of removing the stolons. With their fast growth, you will achieve a full, evenly sized pot of floriferous crowns. When all the crowns are mature, I usually allow each crown to produce 2 or 3 stolons to trail down and add drama to the presentation. I pinch all additional stolons and maintain the plant this way. By all means, root those pinched stolons to share with your gesneriad friends!

For trailing plants, such as scandent *Columnnea* and *Aeschynanthus*, the removal of growing tips, from the trailing stem, will promote branching and a fuller plant and the removes tips can be used to fill in bare areas in the pot or general propagation. With *Aeschynanthus*, it should be noted that some bloom on older growth and pinching the tips can interrupt and delay flowering.



At our next meeting Jim will show up how to create some artistic displays similar to this beauty!

\*\*\*\*\*

**DAVS**

**Photos: Barry Woolf**



Some beautiful photos from the Delaware African Violet Society's Show/Sale in March 2013. Sorry, do not have information on the names and growers. But do enjoy the photos!





### Desperately Seeking

<i>Primulina</i>	'Cynthia'	Andrew Norris
<i>Chrysothemis</i>	'Black Flamingo'	Barry Woolf
<i>Chrysothemis</i>	<i>puchella</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>capitatus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>cutucuensis</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Drymonia</i>	'First Peach'	Jim Roberts
<i>Episcia</i>	'Jim's Golden Eagle'	Barry Woolf
<i>Episcia</i>	'Star of Bethlehem'	Barry Woolf
<i>Kohleria</i>	'Cillia Furber'	Barry Woolf
<i>Lysionotus</i>	<i>serratus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>lynchii</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>mettittifolia</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Nautilocalyx</i>	<i>picturatus</i>	Lee Linett
<i>Pearcea</i>	<i>hypocyrtilifolia</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Primulina</i>	'Nimbus'	Barry Woolf
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<i>Sinningia</i>	'Li'l Georgie'	Lee Stradley
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Orange Raindrops'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>cardinalish</i>	
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<i>Sinningia</i>	'Gabriel's Horn'	Barry Woolf
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>aurantica</i>	Andrew Norris
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>zebrina</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>multiflora</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Streptocarpus</i>	'Cape Essense'	Mike Cagley



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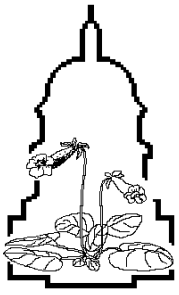
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# Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society

Volume 44 Number 6

June 2013



Barbara's *Sinningia* 'Scoundrel' x self

## Sinningia Tubers

Barb Stewart

I have a wide variety of *Sinningias*, from an unnamed micro-miniature in a glass jar to a large tuber of *Sinningia speciosa* 'Touch of Spice' just about to bloom. *Sinningias* seem to come and go under my conditions, so I rounded up my scattered collection of *Sinningias* to see what I have. Most are putting up new growth at this time; however, a couple were dried up and lifeless, and one seemed like it was still viable, but showing no growth. (I'll give that one a while longer to show some signs of life.) Others, like *Sinningia tubiflora* have produced a pot full of tubers, or produce a cluster of tubers stacked on top of each other which can be separated. Although I am not really an expert on *Sinningias*, I shall share some of my experiences as well as photos from other members who probably grow them better than I do. *Sinningias* are New World *gesneriads* mostly from

Most NCAC meetings are held at the National Arboretum.

Doors open at 10:00am with the meeting starting at 10:30am on the second Saturday of the month.

Saturday, August 10<sup>th</sup> Location and Program TBA

Meetings for 2013: September 14 October 12

December 14

Central and South America. They form tubers to store nutrients while dormant during the dry season. I store dormant tubers in different ways. Large ones remain in their pots, and I move them from the wet matting to an unmatting tray where they can dry and not rot while dormant. For smaller ones, I have tried removing them from the pots and storing them in a snack size Ziploc bag clipped to the edge of my light fixture so I can watch for new growth. The first time I tried this, I wrapped the tuber in a damp paper towel as someone suggested, and was excited to see it sprout within a couple of months. Others did not fare as well. Some re-sprouted, and some dried out. I found that if they stay too long in the bag, the paper towel develops a severe case of black mold, so I now use sphagnum moss instead.

Most people want to know how to get a tuber out of dormancy. The general consensus is that there is nothing you can do to wake up a dormant tuber. Just keep it on the dry side so it doesn't rot. (I occasionally give mine a little plain water if it has been dry a long time. Do not fertilize, as accumulated fertilizer may burn the new growth.)

Then it is up to nature. If all goes well, it will sprout when it is ready. One suggestion is to leave a stub of the old stem when the plant goes dormant. This reduces the risk of pulling out the growing point and leaving nothing for the new growth to sprout from.



*Sinningia tubiflora* tubers



*Sinningia* 'Tampa Bay Beauty'



Cross section of a *Sinningia* tuber

*Sinningias* vary in their growth habits. Some sprout one stem, and others produce many sprouts but only a few fully develop unless something happens to the main stem. My favorite *Sinningias* are the ones that never really go dormant. When the plant dies back, new sprouts begin to form. Another question about *Sinningia* tubers is how deep to plant them. This



*Sinningia piresiana*

varies by species and depends on where they grow in nature. Some grow on hillsides or cliff faces where erosion exposes the tuber, or are epiphytic. These can be planted with the top of the tuber exposed. Some have interesting and decorative surfaces which add to their beauty when entered in a show. Others



*Sinningia schiffneri*

grow where there is more soil and can be buried below the soil surface. Since I have no idea where my different *Sinningias* come from, I generally plant mine at the soil level. The tubers seem to find their own optimal level eventually. However, a good reference for a number of species can be found at [www.burwur.net](http://www.burwur.net) (“To Bury or Not to Bury”).

*Sinningias* are fascinating yet sometimes challenging plants that are generally easy to grow. It is always exciting to see one sprout from dormancy, and most of them quickly reward us with beautiful blossoms in a wide variety of colors.



*Sinningia piresiana* stretching the pot



*Sinningia cardinalis* ‘Red Feather’



If the pot's too small, the tuber will find a way to fit:  
*Sinningia reitzii* 'Magenta'



*Sinningia* sp. 'Pancas' grows epiphytically. Actually not - grows on the surface of rock, but Mauro is successful with it growing on a piece of bark.



*Sinningia douglasii* growing on a tree



*Sinningia macropoda* (which means "big foot")



Here's a *Sinningia bullata*. Never goes dormant.

Thanks to Jim Robert's for these photos

## Ask Mr. Gesneriad

I am potting up some *Sinningia* tubers. The new shoots are coming off the side of the tuber. Should I center the tuber in the pot or place it so the new growth is centered?  
Barb Stewart



Do what you can to bring the growth closer to the center, but keep the size of the pot in good proportion to the size of the tuber. Judges shouldn't take off points if all the growth coming out of a tuber is on one side. That's not something that you can control. However a centered, 12" tall sprout in a 12" pot would look over potted and would probably lose you some points (unless the exposed tuber was that size!).

**Bloomin' Now** for Andrew Norris



*Streptocarpus* 'Spin Art'



*Saintpaulia* 'Water Dancer'



*Streptocarpus* 'Roulette Cherry'



*Streptocarpus* 'Bristol's Kiss Me'





Barb's *Episcia* 'Harmony's Slinky Pink'



Barb's *Primulina* 'Chastity'

During our May meeting Jim showed us step-by-step how to create an artistic design with various basic materials you can find around the house or in the yard,

Jim uses dried wild grape vines, bamboo, grasses such as quaking oats, wild honeysuckle or bitter sweet vine. He finds unusual small containers to use along with flowers from the gesneriad family.

Also leaves of colorful gesneriad foliage can be used. He mentioned how the emphasis should be on the material, not have the container overshadow the design. He also recommended you must follow the theme in the show category.

He creatively uses a hot glue gun to hold just about any object in place. Jim made it seem very simple to try your hand at this design category at our shows.



Jim putting together the arrangement with help from the crowd!



Completed arrangement Jim made from help from all present. Amazing!



Primulina Show n' Tell at May Meeting

## Desperately Seeking List

If you can share a plant or seeds with a member please do!

<i>Primulina</i>	'Cynthia'	Andrew Norris
<i>Chrysothemis</i>	<i>Black Flamingo'</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Chrysothemis</i>	<i>puchella</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>capitatus</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Corytoplectus</i>	<i>cutucuensis</i>	Jim Roberts
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<i>Saintpaulia</i>	'Optimara Colorado'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Dark Eyes'</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Li'l Georgie'	Lee Stradley
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Little Venus'</i>	Corey Wickliffe
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Orange Raindrops'	Mike Cagley
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>cardinalish</i>	
<i>Sinningia</i>	'Innocence'	Barry Woolf
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Orange Rain Drops'</i>	Barry Woolf
<i>Sinningia</i>	<i>Gabriel's Horn'</i>	Barry Woolf
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<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>zebrina</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Smithiantha</i>	<i>multiflora</i>	Jim Roberts
<i>Streptocarpus</i>	'Cape Essense'	Mike Cagley



Barb listening to Jim's critique of the Primulina



Our May meeting attendees listening to Jim in the Arboretum's new classroom on the main floor

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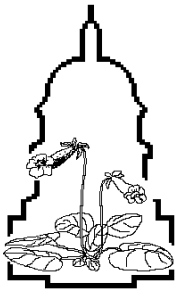
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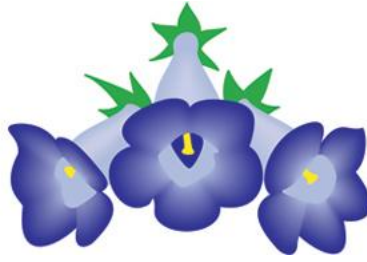
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# Petal Tones



Volume 44 Number 7

August 2013

The Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society



## My Trip to China

**Disappearing Mountains, White Bees, Venomous Caterpillars and Grandma's *Primulina***

**Stephen Maciejewski**

### **NCAC's August 10, 2013 Meeting**

Stephen Maciejewski will be speaking at the August meeting of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society. If you have never been to one of his trip talks, you are in for a treat. His trips are amazing, and he's an excellent and entertaining speaker!

Join us as we listen to Stephen, who is from the Liberty Bell chapter in Philadelphia, as he takes us on a 15-day journey into a seldom seen section

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Doors open at 10:00am with the meeting starting at 10:30am on the second Saturday of the month.

Saturday, August 10<sup>th</sup> Stephen Maciejewski: My Trip to China

September 14<sup>th</sup> TBA

October 26<sup>th</sup> Bob & Dee Stewart: Streptocarpus

December 14<sup>th</sup> Christmas Party

of China. Follow Stephen & Professor Wei Yi-Gang, author of "Gesneriaceae of South China" as they travel 3,000 kilometers in search of beautiful, rare and still unnamed species of gesneriads. You'll see plants never seen before: many *Primulinas*, other *gesneriads* and plants like the cave growing iridescent blue *Begonia edulis*; plus spectacular scenery, including other worldly karst mountains, caves larger than ball parks, elaborate rice fields and quaint villages.

Learn how a little caterpillar can have a major effect on your plants. For those with a culinary interest, there is a soup I won't mention here, white bees with ginger and green slime fungus with vegetables: a feast for all your senses. Do not miss this great event!

## A Lighter Mix for Epiphytes, Tuberous Plants, and Favorites

Andrew Norris

When I began my plant growing journey, at least 15 years ago, I spent lots of time combining different components, to make various plant collections happy. I grew epiphytes, bromeliads, orchids, and carnivorous plants, aquatic plants...you name it and I've grown it! I recently returned to my roots a bit, with my gesneriads growing. I will explain my methods and reasoning here.



I sought to seek an alternative to our normal soilless growing mix, for a few reasons. One reason was that plants seemed to decline, at around the same time frame, the mix itself starts to look unsightly. In wicking, this was often before the mix should have been tired and the plant was due to be repotted.



*Sinningia douglasii* tuber in the mix

Another reason is that I have a strong aversion to seeing the perlite, in quantity, at the top of my mix. This especially true, once the perlite is stained and forms a tarnished top dressing in my plant pots. This is unavoidable, because I top water my wicked

plants, before placing them on wicks. I do this for several weeks, until I am sure the plant roots are able to handle the constant presence of water. This reduces my losses and damaged crown, significantly. While top watering serves its purpose, it also results in the perlite floating to the top of the mix and is time consuming. If I could find a dark colored, cost effective, alternative to garish perlite, I would.



*Sinningia* 'Prudence Ridley' in the mix

An additional reason I decided a new approach was needed, is that I tend to root valued cutting in long fibered sphagnum moss. I find the moss promotes an environment less prone to rotting and is better able to support cuttings for a length of time, without loss. Interestingly, the plants, ones rooted, seem to cease growing, until potted in traditional mix and others seemed not to root, without the denser, potting mix enveloping the rooting end...the moss was too airy.



*Columnnea gigantea* cutting in the mix

There are many options for aggregates and additions to rooting and soil mixes, but I will only be discussing the components I used, here. My choice of media are working well and were largely dictated by what I had on hand and this translated in you being able to source the ingredients locally or through mail order and garner similar experiences. Before I discuss my alternative choice of media, I will mention that in the cases of tuberous *Sinningias*, *Primulina*, *Gesneria*, and other genera, known to appreciate lime, I add a bit of pelleted dolomite lime, to their mix only. The other genera do not have their mix amended, except they usually get a higher percentage of my usual soilless wicking mix, added.



*Nemathanthus pycnophyllus* in growing mix

My soilless, wicking mix consists of Sunshine Mix #4, with enough perlite added to create a mix of around 75-80% perlite. I also add 1 1/3 -2 cups of Holly Tone to 10 quarts of mix. The size perlite used is very important and while a mix of finer and coarser grades can be used to achieve the total percentage of perlite, in your wicking mix; I feel it is very important that at least 65% be a grade around the size of a large, plump, garden pea. If not, I find my mix gets too compact and the plants suffer.

For rhizomatous plants and plants that grow as epiphytes, as well as tuberous plants that enjoy slightly acid conditions, my amended mix is beneficial because it maintains the correct pH, allows air to reach the roots, resists break down, and holds fertilizer and moisture well. It also does not tend to exhibit the mobility of the perlite that the

soilless mix does and is not such an eyesore. I typically pot the following plants in this mix. *Chrysothemis*, *Sinningias* that do not form tubers or do not go dormant (Prudence Risley and *S.schiffnerii*), *Columnea* (especially the *Dalbergaria*, *Tricantha*, and *Pentadinia* types), and certainly *Kohlerias*, *Streptocarpus*, *Drymonia*, and other plants, would appreciate this mix as well.

The mix consist of about 2 parts long fibered sphagnum moss, chopped with scissors into inch long pieces, 2 parts my usual soilless mix, 2 parts Schultz's Orchid Mix, and 1 part Grade 4 perlite (about popcorn sized). I sometimes add leca stones for plants that are tall or need greater support, drainage, or as a layer in the pot bottom. I do this most often for



Variegated *Phalaenopsis*



Variegated *Phalaenopsis* leaves in mix

plants I am least likely to repot often. To chop the moss, I find it easiest to bunch a wad up, dry, in my hand and cut it with scissors, moving the blades about 1/2" down the bunch, with each cut. I mix the mix while dry, save for maybe a light squirt to keep the dust down. I top water potted plants to get them started and either wick them or continue to top water them. This mix lends itself well to either type of watering. For plants that enjoy lime, I cut my soilless mix component in half, to one part, and add about 2 teaspoons of pelleted lime per 5" pot. I like to pot my



*Columnea orientandina* in mix

tuberous *Sinningias*, *Gesneria*, and some *Primulina* in this mixture. I also tend to reduce the moss component and increase the amount of perlite for tubers, because they are less likely to rot during dormancy this way.

So far, I have noted the ease with which dormant rhizomes can be left in both mixes and occasionally top watered, until growth is resumed, without rotting.

The same is true for tuberous plants. I have also noted an improved appearance in plants I have moved to this mix, increased success in rooting some cuttings, in this mix, and a greatly improved appearance to my potting mix. I hope you will give this a try or try your hand at mixing your own, custom blend for your most special plants and have as much success as I have. Happy Growing

Bloomin' Now

Barb Stewart's plants



*Sinningia* TZ x PB (Texas Zebra x ?)



Bloomin' Now cont'



Barb's *Eucadonia* 'Adele'



Barb's *Eucadonia* – unidentified plant with smaller flowers & leaves than 'Adele', red hairs on the stems and back of leaves, but not as hairy as 'Adele'. It is very leggy and trailing off the plant shelf!



Hummingbird moth enjoying some Bee Balm



## Species Streptocarpus

Program by Dee and Bob Stewart

October 26, 2013 NCAC Meeting

There are over 150 species of *Streptocarpus* known so far. They range from plants small enough to bloom in a thimble to plants with a single leaf over two feet long. The genus *Streptocarpus* has provided many beautiful, floriferous plants for our enjoyment. These plants have even become popular with the casual house plant grower under the moniker "Cape Primroses". Focusing on species of *Streptocarpus* subgenus *Streptocarpus*, this program will discuss their growth habit, culture and provide a glimpse at a number of the very desirable species.

*Streptocarpus* have a very unusual growth habit. Understanding how they grow will contribute to understanding how to grow them. This program will review what's unique about the way *Streptocarpus* species grow throughout their life-cycle. Given that background, we'll discuss how to grow these plants successfully, including how to grow them without pots - nature's way! Along the way, you'll see many of the species that make this genus so popular!

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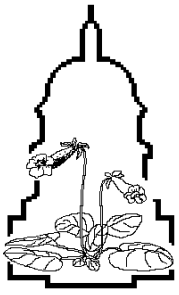
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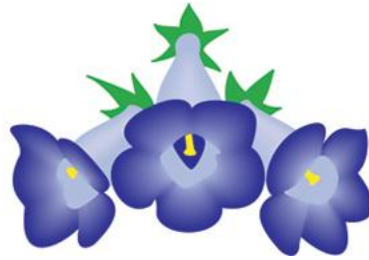
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# Petal Tones



Volume 44 Number 8

September 2013



*Columnnea lehmanni* (looks like candy corn) grown by Barb Stewart

## President's message: Corey Wickliffe

Hello all!

It's hard to believe that summer is supposed to be over when we are still getting temperatures in the 90s! I just got back from the beach (and even managed to tan a little instead of looking like cooked lobster) and the way my Episcias are growing I know the temperatures are still high even in my apartment. Soon enough they will pout with cooler temperatures, but for now they are sending out stolons with a vengeance. Outdoors it seems the perfect weather for some sun loving larger Sinningias, but the writing is on the wall it seems... days are getting shorter and some of the Gessies that love that sort of thing are putting on a show.

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September 14th President, Corey Wickliffe speaking about hybridizing Double Sinningias

October 26<sup>th</sup> Guest Speakers Bob & Dee Stewart speak about growing Streptocarpus

December 14th Christmas Party

I can't grow Smithiantha to save my life, but I keep hearing reports that this is their time to shine. Time soon enough for some to hit dormancy, but for now there seems to be a lovely show. The only thing I can think of is how much I can't wait for things to slow down... I have so much plant work to do!

As I plan to repot and break plants down for the winter months, I'm excited by some of the up and coming plants I will be able to share, and plants that will hopefully continue to mature and grow well as possible show candidates in the spring. I'm determined to bring some interesting species to our show, and encourage others to do the same. My goal is interesting and different rather than show perfect - I don't grow to show, but I'm more than happy to show what is interesting to grow!

So if you don't have something you think you may

want to show in the spring, then grab a plant from the raffle table and try something different. This month I'll have a few young *Amalophyllon sp.* RM2006 Dark Form on the table that would be great to experiment with if you haven't grown them before.

Last month we took a stunning tour around China hunting for *Gesneriads* with Stephen Maciejewski, but this month we're taking it back to the New World with *Sinningia* and how we're trying to break nature's rules! I will be talking about the educational journey I've taken around *Sinningia* over the last year, exploring not just species, but interesting traits and hybrids that have been developed in the genus as well as some of the future in hybridizing. Also make sure to mark your calendars for October 26 - Dee and Bob Stewart will be visiting us to give a talk on Species *Streptocarpus*!

Other thoughts to discuss at our meeting: should we talk about doing a little show? When is the next Brazil Seed order? Hope to see you Saturday!

Corey

## Seeing Double - Hybridizing Double Flowering Sinningias

By Corey Wickliffe

It's amazing how an offhand comment can lead off into a host of new ideas to explore. I know exactly when this train of thought started, and it was like being hit by a brick. When explaining my *Sinningia* hybridizing goal of making a micro in any color other than white, lavender, or purple it happened - "Why are you only looking at color? Why not try for other traits too? You know, like doubles." Well... huh.

There was absolutely no good reason why not, and even in my evaluation of what hybrids I wanted to use in my project a number of doubles showed up on the list. I would not even need to take an extra step (which can actually end up being multiple generations!) if I wanted to add them to the mix. My investigative little brain got rolling and I immediately started hunting down information on doubles - which included chatting with Dale Martens who has been lucky enough to use both traits in her hybrids over

the years. She was kind enough to give me the basic run down which I can now pass on to you.

Turns out there are multiple doubles - calyx and petal doubles - that you're most likely to come across in the mini to compact sizes (*S. speciosa* hybrids also have a double trait, but since I'm unsure how it relates I've not included it here). While they achieve a look of ruffled heavy flower similar in look of a rose they do it in completely different ways. The differences in how they change a flower also translates over to how you use them in hybridizing - both traits force the plant to only be a seed parent or pollen parent, but which is which depends on which trait the flower has.

### **Petal Double**

Typically when people are referring to "double" *Sinningia* they are talking about the Petal Double mutation. In this case you see extra petals in the center of the flower, while the outside of the flower is otherwise normal looking.

This was a mutation that evidently showed up in a miniature *Sinningia* hybrid of Treva McDaniel and was named 'Emily'. This hybrid was the parent to the petal double mini sinningias that are still popular today, and this trait is still being hybridized by a number of people including Dale Martens and David Harris (of the "Ozark" series). Having developed in minis originally, this mutation is typically found in plants smaller than the Calyx Doubles.



Calyx double on the left split open, no green calyx, see the fat style? That's deformed. Notice it has filaments with anthers attached. The flower on the right is a double petal. No anther and the style is normal. Photo courtesy Dale Martens.



Calyx Double on top with no separate green calyx  
Petal double on bottom. Photo Dale Martens

### Calyx Double

A Calyx Double is a whole different kettle of fish. Rather than having the extra petals on the inside, the extra petals are on the outside of the flower. The calyx are typically the leafy green bits that protect the bud as it forms and is where the flower attaches to the stem, but in the case of this mutation they are actually mutated into additional petals.



Gabriel's Horn with a calyx double with split calyx.  
Photo by Kyoto Imai

This mutation originated in *Sinningia cardinalis* and started out as strap-like extensions of the calyx around the tube of the flower. You can still see this in hybrids such as the ever popular 'Gabriel's Horn'. Due to the species background of these plants they tend to be larger/compact and are not miniature in size.



Heartland's Double Dilly a petal double hybrid  
grown by Tim Tuttle photo by Kyoto Imai

Evidently the strap-like extensions was not attractive to everyone, so a current goal of hybridizers is to have joined calyxes which results in a "hose-in-hose" look to the flowers. This can be seen on Dale Marten's hybrid 'Playful Porpoise' - a very popular hybrid parent. This trait has been passed on by hybridizers such as Thad Scaggs (with hybrids such as 'Diva' and 'Party Dress') as well as gaining popularity in Asia through hybridizers such as Vivan Liu (hybridizer of the only yellow calyx double - 'An's Nyx').

### Hybridizing with the Doubles

Now that we can tell the differences, what's stopping us from having doubles of everything? I can't help but look at my micros and want to start crossing them with a few petal and calyx doubles just to see what happens... but what do I need to know to be successful? It goes back to both not having all their reproductive parts working - and the key is to remember which is which.

The Petal Double mutation is taking the male flower parts and turning them into petals. While you get a corolla tube full of petals you don't get pollen, so a

Petal Double can only be a seed parent. Since nothing is every easy the catch to this method is that this trait doesn't seem to be particularly strong - the first generation of a cross may result in few, if any, doubles. Crossing that generation to get a second generation from that cross seems to increase the rate they show up, so keep crossing and keep hoping!



Sinningia Danielle grown and photographed by Kyoto Imai

The Calyx Double mutation seems like it shouldn't influence the reproductive ability of the plant but it does - the ovaries on these plants seem to be deformed. Some are obviously so, while in at least one recent hybrid ('An's Nyx') the ovaries don't look deformed, but setting seed on this plant hasn't happened yet as far as we know, despite attempts. It is unknown if the ovaries are causing the issue, or maybe it is just a genetic incompatibility in the hybrid given it's complex species history. Ah, the joys of complex hybrids! Thankfully they seem to have a good amount of pollen, and barring any complex genetic issues they can still be used for hybridizing. The trait also seems to be pretty strong and up around 50% of the seedlings may be calyx doubles! Just remember if you have a developing seed pod to remove the flower yourself - because of the modified calyx the flower does not fall off on its own and typically has to be removed by hand.

Time to go find some doubles and splash around some pollen!

*A big thanks goes out to Dale Martens for sharing this information, providing photos, and mentoring me on my Sinningia hybridizing travels.*

## EPISCIA – GROWING FOR SHOW

**By: Lee Linett**

One of the popular names for *Episcia* is “Peacock Plant,” no doubt due to the variety of foliage colorations, and whether you grow them at home to add a spot of color here and there or you grow *Episcias* to enter in flower a show, just a few steps will ensure they'll come through with flying colors. This is how I grow *Episcias* under my growing conditions:

1. Temperature range: 70-80 degrees F.;
2. Atmospheric humidity: 40% - 60%;
3. Water: Evenly moist, Not Wet;
4. Potting medium: Must be well-draining (1-1-1 works well). You can also use Metro Mix or Pro Mix B with an addition of 1/2 part plain kitty litter;
5. Pot: Either plastic or clay; I like to use azalea pots
6. Fertilizer: 1/4 strength every watering with a variety of fertilizers. Flush with plain water every fifth watering.
7. Light: For a 2-tube 40 watt fluorescent set-up, I use one cool white plus one daylight with the *Episcias* placed 4” – 6” from the tubes. North East and East windows also provide good light. Fluorescents are on for 14-16 hours per day.



*Episcia* hybrids assortment

To grow a show plant, you must start with healthy cuttings that should not have more than two sets of almost-mature leaves.

- ❖ Fill an azalea pot (4" – 6" in diameter) with your potting mix to within 1" of the pot rim. Tap the pot to settle the mix and water with warm water to thoroughly moisten.
- ❖ Poke a hole for each cutting and sink each cutting to just below the bottom leaves. Firm the mix around each cutting and when the pot is full, water from the top, let drain, and enclose in a glass covered terrarium or plastic bag.
- ❖ Put the potted cuttings at the end of the tubes or out of direct sun for a week and then remove from the terrarium or bag. Note: Humidity should be at least 40%.
- ❖ Leave the potted cuttings at the end of the tubes for another week; by this time they will be rooted and well on their way to the show.
- ❖ For the next 2 months, remove all stolons that form as well as any flower buds that pop up. The plan is, grow nice leaves as large as possible on a plant (several cutting in a pot are considered to be one plant) that is as symmetrical as possible.
- ❖ If you are using a 1-1-1 mix, you will have to begin fertilizing as soon as the cuttings have rooted; if using a soil-based mix, wait a month after roots form.
- ❖ For the entire time up to show, you will need to adjust the amount of light the *Episcia* receives by moving the pot closer to the center of the tubes.

Broadly speaking, *Episcias* are not high light growers, nor do they do best in low light condition; however, for good flower production they should receive more light than if grown only for foliage.

At the end of the 2-3 months, allow stolons to form, but only at the bottom. Continue removing stolons that form at the top and middle and remove flower buds. Because *Episcias* are fairly symmetrical plants, you want to maintain this symmetry with the largest leaves on the bottom along with the largest stolons. Removing the competing stolons that grow higher up on the plant will ensure this.

At the end of 3 months, stop removing stolons except for those that spoil the symmetry; allow them to grow out to their full potential. You will see that the stolons produced are shorter, sturdier and have larger leaves.

In another week, allow flower buds to form if you plan to show the *Episcia* with flowers. Note: The larger, older stolons should also have flowers or buds showing color.

I have found that *Episcia* 'Temptation' and *Episcia*. 'Silverdust' grow in sort of a cascading style that begins almost as soon as the plant/cutting has rooted and will grow this way no matter what you do; most of the stolons are produced at the top of the plants and tend to cascade downwards, but with a bit of judicious leaf realigning, you can maintain symmetry as best as possible.

In 5 months of growing, it is possible a bottom leaf or two will have to be removed – remember the 1" space you left in the pot? That is so you can add some fresh potting medium if needed which always looks good before a show although, for *Episcias*, you should not be able to see anything but leaves when you look down at the plant sitting on the table.



*Episcia* 'Strawberry Patch' – grown by Carol Hamelink

You will notice that I have not addressed the subject of pests and diseases, so suffice it to say that *Episcias* are subject to the same pests and diseases that affect other gesneriads and can be treated with the same remedies. Cleanliness and common sense go a long way in keeping your *Episcias* healthy: isolate newly-



acquired plants; keep the growing area clean and make sure all potting and grooming material is clean & sterilized; do groom your *Episcias* as needed; keep the air moving with a small whisper fan; dust the lights.

Over the years I have grown dozens of *Episcias* and am always willing to try new ones, yet I always return to the same ones which have proven very reliable for flowering, foliage, and ease of growth: 'Acajou'; 'Cotton Candy'; 'Keewee'; *lilacina*' 'Malay Ebony'; 'Malay Ruby'; 'Pink Panther'; 'Plum Country'; 'Tricolor'; 'Tropical Topaz'; 'Temptation'; and *xantha*.

For something different (as in – you don't know what you'll get), try growing from seed. The Gesneriad Society has mixed *Episcia* seed and there is every chance you will be able to grow some really nice plants. NOTE: When transporting *Episcias*, A.V. rings are useful for keeping leaves and stolons from touching the bottom of the box – or you can snuggle the pots into Styrofoam peanuts to cushion them.



*Episcia* 'Unpredictable Valley'

De-static the peanuts by placing them in a large bag with two or three unscented dryer sheets, shake them around, and let them sit in the bag a half hour. Rings of tightly coiled newspaper also will stabilize pots in a box; use tissue paper underneath leaves and stolons to protect them. Bubble wrap should be placed as a "top covering" over the plant(s) in the box when transporting in cool weather.

I would encourage people to bring cuttings or stolons to share for the raffle table. This is a great way to increase your collection and acquire new varieties.

**There are just two things to keep in mind when entering *Episcias* in a show:**

**1. Foliage MUST be distinctive (either by means of color, pattern or texture) to enter in the foliage class, and**

**2. Flowers should be evenly distributed around the plant for the flowering class.**

In the home, grow *Episcias* for spots of color and enjoy them in hanging baskets, terrarium plantings, strawberry jars, or just cascading over their pots! Enjoy !!!

## August 2013 Meeting by Harold Belcher



Stephen's presentation was excellent! He mentioned that it was 7,872 miles from Philadelphia to Guiyang, China. Guiyang is the capital of the Guizhou Province in Southwest China. There is only one time zone in China, which I found interesting.

The average temperature in Guizhou is 75 to 85 degrees, although they may get snow in the winter. Dr. Hue was Stephen's guide during the trip, and Mr. Tang was his driver. Dr. Hue is trying to preserve as many endangered species of gesneriads.

He has traversed much of the region and was able to show Stephen many specimens of *Primulina* throughout the area, some of which grow close by the entrance in caves. Stephen mentioned that Chinese folk like variety in their diet in that they don't like to eat the same meal twice in the same month.

Our members were treated to slides of *Primulinas* growing near waterfalls as well as slides of the "One Hundred Demon Cave", amazing stonework, arches and beautiful views. We were also treated to sights of culinary delights such as marijuana soup, fried bee's larva and ball tea. I noticed some rhododendrons in some of the slides. Chinese dam

and road construction may cause some of the gesneriads species to be lost. Another reason for the problems that those plants face in the wild is that they are used for medicinal purposes.

Global warming and climate change may also cause some plants to be lost. Some of the populations of *Paraboea* and *Primulina* have less than 1,000 plants left in the wild.

Stephen also travelled to Vietnam to visit some of the gardens in that country. The gardens in Vietnam were quite impressive, especially those with tigers chained to pedestals. The tigers and visitors seemed to get along quite well together. The whole trip cost about \$3,500.00 for 15 days and two countries. The flight was about \$1,700.00, hotels were around \$12.00 per night and meals were \$5.00 per day. He is planning on making a March 20, 2014, trip and additional trips each year.

If you are interested in traveling to enjoy gesneriads, I would plan to be a part of one of Stephen's trips! It was a wonderful presentation and NCAC plans on inviting Stephen back to speak of some of his other trips!

### Bloomin' Now



*Achimenes* 'Harry Williams' grown by Barb Stewart who donated it to the raffle table in August and it bloomed for Donna on her back deck underneath umbrella-ed table.



Andrew Norris with one of his amazingly beautiful plants. This one is a variegated *Streptocarpus*!



*Streptocarpus* Rondul's Kazia by Andrew Norris



*Streptocarpus* 'Suzie' by Andrew Norris



*XGloximannia* 'She's Dancin' by Andrew Norris



*Streptocarpus* 'Birdie' by Andrew Norris



*Sinningia speciosa* hybrid white



*Saintpaulia* 'Celina Elegance' by Andrew Norris



Jim's hybrid *Gloxina* 'Dragonsong'



*Sinningia Speciosa* 'Bristol's Galaxy Tour'  
Andrew Norris



Barb Stewart's *Achimenes* 'Purple King'



Jim Roberts at the August Meeting showing off some examples of Primulina's.

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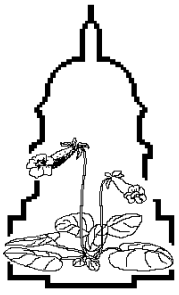
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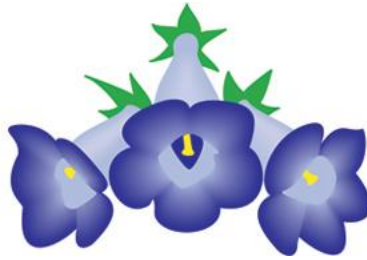
The Gesneriad Society website:

[www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)



# Petal Tones

Volume 44 Number 9



October 2013



## Species Streptocarpus Program

by Dee and Bob Stewart

October 26, 2013 NCAC Meeting

There are over 150 species of *Streptocarpus* known so far. They range from plants small enough to bloom in a thimble to plants with a single leaf over two feet long. The genus *Streptocarpus* has provided many beautiful, floriferous plants for our enjoyment.

These plants have even become popular with the casual house plant grower under the moniker "Cape Primroses". Focusing on species of *Streptocarpus* subgenus *Streptocarpus*, this program will discuss their growth habit, culture and provide a glimpse at a number of the very desirable species.

*Streptocarpus* have a very unusual growth habit. Understanding how they grow will contribute to understanding how to grow them. This program will review what's unique about the way *Streptocarpus* species grow throughout their life-cycle. Given that background, we'll discuss how to grow these plants successfully, including how to grow them without pots - nature's way! Along the way, you'll see many of the species that make this genus so popular!

NCAC Meeting at The Behnke Nurseries, 11300 Baltimore Ave, Beltsville, MD 20705  
(on US-1, a couple of miles from I-495)

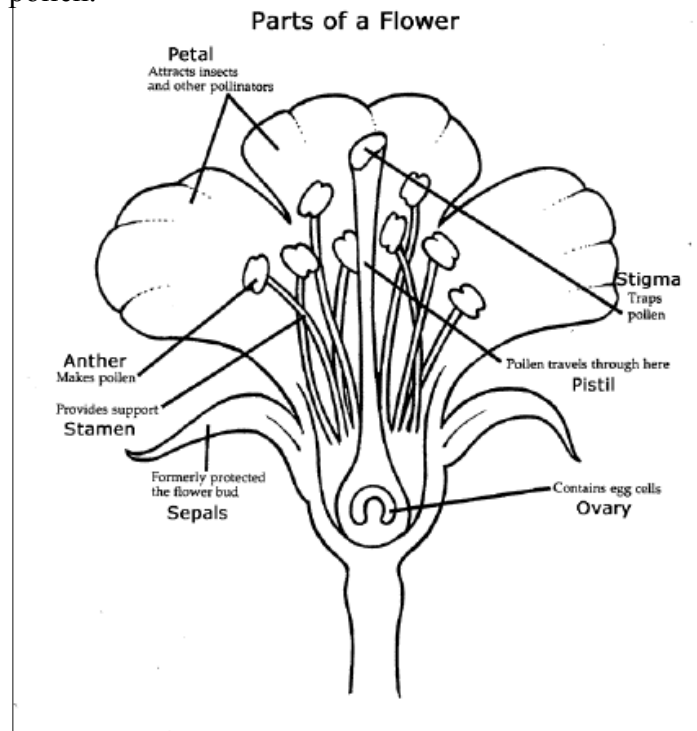
**Time:** Saturday October 26, 2013, 10 a.m. (doors open at 9:30)

Future meeting sites will be announced pending negotiations with the Arboretum.

# Pollinating your Gesneriads

By Karyn Cichocki from Gesneriad Tips 'n Trivia, 37(2013) No.4, Karyn Cichocki, Editor

With a little observation, practice, patience and luck you can successfully pollinate your Gesneriads. Once your plants start blooming, watch the flowers to observe the stages that the flowers go through. When the flower first opens, the pollen is ripe and it is at the “Male” stage of reproduction.. This is the time when the pollinator will visit the flower and pick up the pollen, which will be taken to other flowers. After two or three days, the flower will enter the “Female” stage when the stigma is ready to accept pollen.



By observing the flowers on your plants you can see them change from one stage to another. The photo above of an *Achimenes* flower, taken by Dale Martens, shows the stamens, which support the anthers, have retreated back into the flower tube. The pistil, which supports the stigma is growing toward the face of the flower. So this flower is approaching the “Female” stage.

I think that *Kohleria* flowers are the easiest to tell when the stigma is ready to receive pollen. On many the stigma will actually come out past the face of the flower, the tip is split in two ready to accept pollen. *Sinningia* flowers are also fairly easy to tell when the stigma is ready for pollen.



The picture shows the flower in the “Male” stage and the stigma is not visible. The picture on the right shows that it is past the “Male” stage and is almost at the “Female” stage with the stigma visible. At this time you should start placing pollen on the stigma. This can be done by either placing pollen on a brush, the tip of your finger or holding the anther with a pair of tweezers and cut it from the flower and dabbing the stigma with the pollen. This should be done each day for at least 3 days. Some flowers, such as *Nematanthus* need to be cut open in order to get to the stigma. If you are hybridizing, you will want to cut the anthers off the flower to avoid self pollination. Some flowers, such as *Sinningia pusilla*, will pollinate themselves prior to the flower opening, so if you want to hybridize with those types of flowers, you will need to cut the flower open, before it opens and remove the anthers. This requires proper timing and skill so if you want to hybridize with those types of flowers, you will need to cut the flower open, before it opens and remove the anthers. This requires proper timing



and skill so that the stigma is not cut or damaged. Keep an eye on the stigma to watch it change its shape, some split open (*Kohleria*, *Primulina*), others develop a slit indentation (*Sinningia*, *Nematanthus*) when mature. Once pollination is successful you will see the stigma start

to shrivel and die back and the ovary at the base of the flower will start to swell. In some plants such as *Nematanthus*, higher humidity is required for successful pollination an/or development of fruit. Once pollination is successful you will see the stigma start to shrivel and die back and the ovary at thebase of the flower will start to swell. In some plants such as *Nematanthus*, higher humidity is required for successful pollination and/or development of fruit. Here is a photo of *Sinningia sulcato*, taken



by Mauro Peixoto, showing the different stages. 1. the flower has just opened, 2. the flower is in the “Male” stage with the prominent anthers and 3. the flower is in the “Female” stage with the stigma extending out past the anthers. The picture to the right of *Sinningia piresiana*, shows that after successful pollination the flower stems will raise upward,

possibly to keep them out of the way, allowing pollinators to get to the remaining flowers. The picture on the below shows the developing seed pods on *Primulina linearifolia* and below are the developing berries on *Columnea orientandina*.



Left are the developing twisted seed pods of *Streptocarpus*.



## How I Grow My Show-winning *Petrocosmeas*

From Petal Tones April 2010

By Andrew Norris



Best in Show *Petrocosmea* Collection

The March 2010 show was a whirlwind of excitement and reward for me. It was my first show, my first exhibition, my first blue, and my first Best In Show! I met so many amazing people and the air was heavy with congratulations, jubilation, and information.....it was the greatest experience I've had in my short time growing and I was surprised to learn that I did indeed have show worthy and in fact, show-winning plants! I will attempt to introduce myself and outline as best as possible my growing conditions and what I felt brought me such exciting results. I became interested in violets after having to move and leave my space hogging animal hobby behind. I have always kept or grown something and usually many things. I am empty without something that I can put my head and hands into. I was a purist. I did not even want to consider other gesneriads. I was ONLY going to grow violets. I ordered my first 5 or so plants from eBay vendors and became a frequent poster on the African Violet forum on GardenWeb. Using the AVSA site, I found the Baltimore African Violet Society. It was through this group that I saw my first *Streptocarpus*. It was 'Raspberry Network' grown by Marie Burns. I HAD to have one!! I began looking at pictures of other gesneriads, while searching for information about *Streptocarpus* and growing violets. It was while researching Streps, that I saw those perfectly symmetrical rosettes of *Petrocosmeas*...I knew they were to be too rare and unobtainable for my small budget and limited resources. I continued acquiring and assembling my wish list of AV varieties and keeping the desire for

*Petrocosmeas* on the back burner. I attended my first violet show, courtesy of my local violet club and there I saw my first *Chirita* (now *Primulina*)...I was hooked! I went home and began looking at all of the vendors I had found through my short affiliation with the BAVS and from my interest in violets. I looked for the vendors with the most species and I read what little I could find on growing *Petrocosmeas*. I began dreaming of complex 'potions' of gritty and alkaline growing media and lighting stands. And it was in fact not long before I did buy my first Rubbermaid shelf, shop-lights, and bulbs. I bought yarn and pots, labels and lime....I was going into the deep end of the pool now!

I ordered my first order of *Petrocosmeas* from Cedar Creek Violets, then followed that with an order to Lyndon Lyons, where I ordered a few more and my first *Chiritas*. I nabbed another *Chirita* and Pet at my next BAVS show in May, and also bought myself a handful of Streps, including what proved to be an elusive 'Raspberry Network'. In the time period between December 2008 to May 2009, I had amassed a collection of about 30 violets, 5 Streps, and my collection of Pets and *Chiritas*. I had *Petrocosmea rosettifolia*, *nervosa*, *begoniifolia*, *barbata*, *flaccida*, 'Momo', *parryorum*, *kerrii*, *sericcea*, *sericcea HT-2*, *minor*, *minor spp. #5*, and *foresttii*. My plants were all in thumb pots and they were just as captivating in their tiny pots as they were at the grandiose sizes I saw in pictures online.



*Petrocosmea minor*

So began my journey to winning Best In Show. The rest of this article will be divided into headings for ease of reference and to condense what is already a rather lengthy article.

### **Lighting:**

After careful consideration and my own experience with different types and brands of light, I decided on one 3k 48" bulb and one 6,500k bulb, both T8s. The higher Kelvin rating mimics sunlight and is best for foliage growth and the 3000k stimulates flower production. These bulbs were both Sylvania, which was no accident, as I prefer these to other bulb brands for the amount of useable light they emit and the lamp life. The bulbs were intended for flowering violets, but since I grow my Streps with my Chiritas and Pets, they got the same treatment. A dual combo of 6,500k would probably be as good or even better for foliage growth in Pets and Chiritas. I found that my prefab shelves leave some length between the plants and the fixtures to be desired, but the pets do ok at about 12" away from the bulbs, on for 6-12 hrs a day. I would prefer 18" between the plants and the bulbs and this is certainly needed for my Chiritas and the Streps need the height to accommodate their tall flower stalks. The silvery leaved plants with the most hair (sericea, nervosa) get the center of the stand, while rosettifolia and begoniifolia do well towards the back, front, or sides. The minor complex gets the sides of the fixtures as well. This has the advantage of the plant utilizing more fertilizer and absorbing more water, resulting in better foliage growth.



Petrocosmea sp. HT-2 grown and exhibited by Barbara Stewart

I also use coarse vermiculite, coarse perlite, peat moss, and pelleted dolomite lime in my soil mix. The exact proportions are not really exact, but it goes something like this:

A 1-1.5" layer of perlite goes in the bottom of the pot, then for each gallon of mix I use 1/2 gallon of peat moss, 1/8 gallon of perlite, 1/8 gallon of Turface, and 1/4 gallon of vermiculite. To this, I add 3 bathroom cups full of the pelleted lime. Mix well and you have my trade secret mix. I use the same mix for all of my gesneriads and begonias, just with less lime. I tried testing for Ph, but it just didn't seem accurate and lost its value to me. I just buy the same brand of peat and expect it is somewhat standard in its Ph. I suspect you will have the same results by just adding the cups of lime as I mentioned. If you want to fuss with Ph, I would aim for a Ph of 7.4-8, being sure to acclimate plants that may have been growing in more acid media.

### **Temps:**

I keep my pets cool. No higher than 78F in the summer and in the low 50sF in the winter. I use the day length as a guide and try to approximate this with my lighting schedule, though I never use less than 5-6 hours of light. I like using an unheated basement or closed room, where I can turn off the heat register and crack the window. Several of the pets actually formed tightly closed, dormant centers; similar to hibernacula seen in sedums and sundews, if you are a carnivorous plant grower. The plants grow slowly or not at all with this chill and put on a bloom for me in November into December. I find that the parryorum and kerrii prefer a bit warmer and would be best kept at about 60F at the lowest, though there was no real ill affect at the lower temps. I begin to increase the light with the day length and the temperatures warm on their own, with the change in seasons. A chill is needed for many pets to bloom and from what I have read to set fertile seed. I am not one for hybridizing and growing from seed at this point, so my expertise falls short in that realm and I urge you to seek out Tim Tuttle's blog on *Petrocosmeas*, as he goes in depth about his experiences with pollination and seed setting.

<http://petrocosmea.blogspot.com/2011/07/petrocosmea-minor-kinship-group.html>

**Fertilizers:**

I probably should/could have reduced the amount of fertilizer my plants got in the winter, but I didn't. They did just fine at the rate of 1/8 teaspoonful per gallon of water of Peter's 20-20-20 or Optimara. I also like to mix a half and half bloom booster/20-20-20 mixture on occasion for Pets that I expect to flower and any gesneriads I want to encourage blooming. This 50/50 regime works as a continuous method equally well and so does using 1/4 teaspoonful per gallon, but since I like to use the same water for all my plants, I use the lesser amount.

**Humidity:**

I never did pay too much attention to this. I have had it be higher in a basement setting and while growing on eggcrate, suspended over water trays, but had equal success on individual reservoirs in household humidity. Having the register turned off and the window cracked, as well the plants being grouped together all makes for adequate growing conditions and zero mildew. I had an ugly time in a centrally heated house with violets and mildew this winter, however.

**Watering:**

Again, when the plants were kept cooler, I probably could have allowed them to dry a bit, but mine have always and will still be kept on wicks with reservoirs that are always full. I don't have the diligence to check on plants frequently enough to allow them to dry out. If I had time to monitor daily, I would probably let the reservoirs dry in the winter and monitor daily for the plants' needs. I only ever use distilled water with all of my plants and when I don't have enough from my dehumidifier (not run in the plant room), I buy and use spring water. I do this, because I am on a city water supply that adds fluoride to the water. This is known to accumulate to the detriment of plant growth. If I was on a well and had neutral to slightly basic water, I would be fine with that and rainwater would be an option, where acid rain is not a problem. If your water is too acid, try adding the lime to the water you use for watering your plants, but do flush them every 8 weeks or so to prevent too alkaline of conditions. I use wicks run from the bottom of the pot to the opposite side of the top, to form a diagonal. I use one wick for up to an 8" pot and all I use is acrylic yarn in the standard width.

This has suited all of my wicked plants and I have never needed a larger wick or more than one. Sometimes I have to clean the wicks of algae, so that they do not stop transporting water to the plants' roots, but that is once every 6 months or less. I find the pots placed on a pint container as a reservoir need topping off less than once a month 3 times all Winter! I love this approach to growing gesneriads.

**Propagation:**

Leaf pullings of any crisp leaf had worked for me for all Pets. The newest center leaves are unsuitable, but the older, outer few rows are ideal. I root mine in warmer temps of 68F-78F, in covered trays of moistened media. I find that they root well in any reasonably lit location and most produce plantlets in a few weeks, with a few taking a couple of months. Suckers are also a viable option and are treated the same way as leaf pullings. As soon as the plantlets show a rosette pattern, they can be potted up into 2" pots and treated as adult plants.

**Grooming/Display:**

I find the Pets get all of the grooming they need when repotting. I do remove whole rows of leaves, when one in a row is damaged and I remove immature leaves as well. None of my plants sucker except for '*Momo*', *barbata*, *nervosa*, *kerrii*, and *rosettifolia*. *Kerrii* and *rosettifolia* only suckered after flowering, while '*Momo*', *nervosa*, and *barbata* are constant suckerers. I choose to remove all suckers as soon as they are seen from all of the plants. *Kerrii* is almost always in bloom and therefore gets suckers that need to be removed every 8 weeks or so. *Nervosa* goes through suckering periods and then is well behaved, and *rosettifolia* ceased suckering after blooming was finished. I have never had any pest or disease problems with any of my gesneriads, other than the violets. For showing, I like using moss, rocks, and woodland decor, such as bark, dead leaves, lichen, and twigs. I think that grouped together this way, they look naturalized and in their 'element'. I would like to try growing them in rock planter made of pumice or tufa, maybe even simulated rock, concrete planters. If you chose to grow a group in a natural style container, try ageing it outside and allowing it to grow mosses and lichens to really authenticate the look. For me, it was also important to show off the variety of Pets that are out there, so I chose

different foliage types, heights and forms for my collection. Group taller plants towards the back or center and try to arrange a collection that looks good from all sides. I admittedly did not do this so well the first time, but no one seemed to notice my lapse in staging. For display at home on the light stands, I do the same; that is place the taller and larger plants towards the back and smaller to the front. I also like to group similar foliage types together. I bet trying pets in the outdoor shade garden would also be a great way to show them off, though they would not survive the Pennsylvania Winters. They could be grown in planters or amended soil and would look nice amongst woodland or Japanese style plantings. I expect slugs, deer, and other herbivores to find the less hairy ones quite edible, so be aware!

I hope I have covered all of the bases to get you interested in *Petrocosmeas* and have good start to growing them. They have proven easy to acquire, grow, and make great companions to your other gesneriads or houseplants. They are tolerant of different temperatures, lighting, and watering habits, and the different foliage types are sure to have something to offer everyone. I find the leaves of *Petrocosmea parryorum* even have a sweet smell, when gently rubbed between the thumb and index finger!!! Give Pets a try and have fun growing your own show winning plants!

#### National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

A Chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

"The purpose of the chapter shall be to afford a convenient and beneficial association of persons interested in Gesneriads; to stimulate a widespread interest in the identification, correct nomenclature, culture, and propagation of Gesneriads; and to encourage the origination and introduction of new cultivars."

(NCAC bylaws, revised April 1981.)

NCAC meets on the second Saturday of the month in the Administration Building of the U.S. National Arboretum. For details, please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, the website, or contact one of the people below.

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