Petal Tones

National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society Newsletter
Volume 47 Number 8 September 2016

Barb Stewart's *Achimenes* NOID purple, so well grown!

NCAC meetings are held at *BEHNKES NURSERIES*
11300 Baltimore Ave, Beltsville, MD 20705
Behnkes opens at 8:00am if you would like to browse and shop before the meeting. Gather at 10am to get set up, with the meeting beginning at 10:30am. Meet the second Saturday of the month. $10 yearly dues.

September 10th: Episcias: Varieties, Culture, and botanical History, presented by Drew Norris

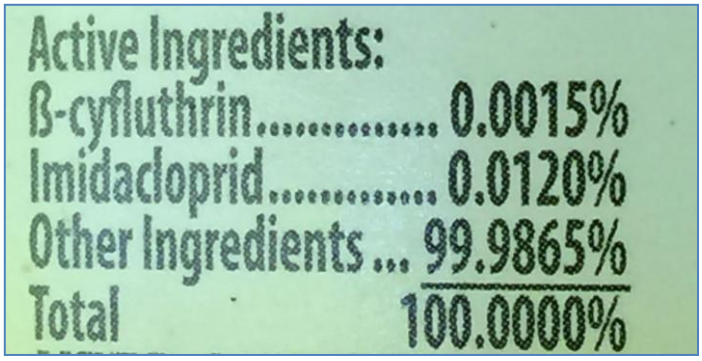
October 8th: Karyn Cichocki will discuss her Gesneriad Collecting Trip to Ecuador. Nominating panel for election of new officers will be determined.

President's Message

Greetings,

Summer is quickly coming to an end and it is almost time to bring in all the plants that have been thriving outdoors in the shade. Where in the world are we going to put them?? They get so big out there, and look so darn good, it's a shame to have to ruin that display and bring them inside where the light is minimal, the humidity is low and the pests which have been under natural control will be allowed to explode throughout the collection. But it must be done. Many a year I've put this task off just a little too long and had to try to recover a plant from the above change in conditions, but also to recover from freeze burn on the tips of the stems. Rhizomes and tubers are easy. Just let the frost kill off the top. By the time that happens the plant should have stored plenty of energy in the tuber or produced many rhizomes in the pot for next year. Cut off the tops and bring them in; however, the fibrous rooted gesneriads can be a challenge. What we do is spray the growth with a good systemic pesticide about a week before bringing them in. Aphids, mealy bugs and other common outdoor pests will be killed, and the residual pesticide will kill off anything that hatches. Take off all flower buds (adult thrips may be residing in them) and repot the plant when you bring it in. Lots of work, but this should protect the rest of your collection. Why repot? Ants often make their nests in the pot, and thrips' life cycle includes eggs and immature thrips in the soil before they climb up onto your plants. And after doing all this work, keep the plants isolated from the rest of your indoor collection for at least a month. Either set up a light stand in a room far away from the other stands, or put them in a window in the main part of the house, away from the rest of your indoor collection. If you don't have those choices, bag the plants to contain anything that might hatch out and not get killed by the residual pesticide. Ziploc makes two gallon bags, or buy a few clear (well, cloudy clear) plastic totes with a "clear" cover and keep the plants enclosed in them for a while. I have used the Bayer products but any systemic will do!

President's Message continued:



This month we will be choosing a Nominating Committee to help find a slate of officers for the 2017-18 term. I have taken over for two Presidents who have had to quit the position and also served too many terms on my own election. It is time for someone else to step up and be President. I'll still be available to give programs – that is NOT the job of the President. The hardest part of the President's job is remembering to send a President's Message to Donna in time to go into Petal Tones. Running the meeting is actually easy. Call the meeting to order, get the Secretary's minutes approved, get the Treasurer's report, and lead the discussions on old and new business. Just like any meeting that you might have to hold at work. We're a decent group of people with few overheated discussions that the President has to try to squash. Normally the VP steps up into the President's position, but Drew's new job has him working every Saturday and his attendance at meetings will be very infrequent. Please consider either position if approached by the Nominating Committee. Other positions to fill are the Secretary (I think Barb can continue in this position since this is her first term) and Treasurer (Barry has indicated that he is not interested in continuing in the position), and of course 3 Directors to fill out the Board. Any of the officers stepping down from their current position are eligible for any other position. I have a list of all the members of the Gesneriad Society which I will distribute to the Nominating Committee. You must be a member of the National organization in order to be an Officer or Director in NCAC of the Gesneriad Society.

Drew is scheduled to give a program on *Episcia* at our upcoming September meeting, but since he will be working I shall give his talk. Please bring in some *Episcia* plants so that we have some variety of live Episcia varieties for member to see. I may have some beat up and stringy plants to bring, but we don't want them to be our only examples of Episcia at the talk. They can be quite beautiful if properly cared for. Jim

Johanna, Sherry, Jim, Donna, Karen and Brian at our terrarium workshop in August. Barb was with us as well and took this photo. Johanna was so generous to allow us to meet in her beautiful home because the weather was outrageously HOT!!!!

NCAC By-Laws

Current wording:

Article IV. Elections

Section 2. Nominating Committee. The President shall appoint a chairman of the Nominating Committee in October of the election year and the Board of Directors shall appoint two additional members. At least one of these members should be selected from outside the Board of Directors. The Nominating Committee shall present a slate of officers to be published in the December issue of Petal Tones. Additional nominations may be made from the floor of the December meeting with the consent of the nominees.

Proposal 1:

Section 2. Nominating Committee. The President shall appoint a chairman of the Nominating Committee in October of the election year and the Board of Directors shall appoint two additional members. At least one of these members **must** be selected from outside the Board of Directors.

This amendment changes "should" to "must". The purpose of this amendment is to eliminate ambiguity and clarify the intent of the article.

Proposal 2:

The Nominating Committee shall present a slate of officers **at the November meeting which will** be published in the December issue of Petal Tones. Additional nominations may be made from the floor of the December meeting with the consent of the nominees.

The purpose of this amendment is to allow more time for the active members to consider the proposed slate of officers before voting, and to allow the proposed President to begin selecting committee chairmen prior to the holidays in preparation for the January meeting.

EPISCIA – GROWING FOR SHOW

September 2013 Petal Tones: 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%

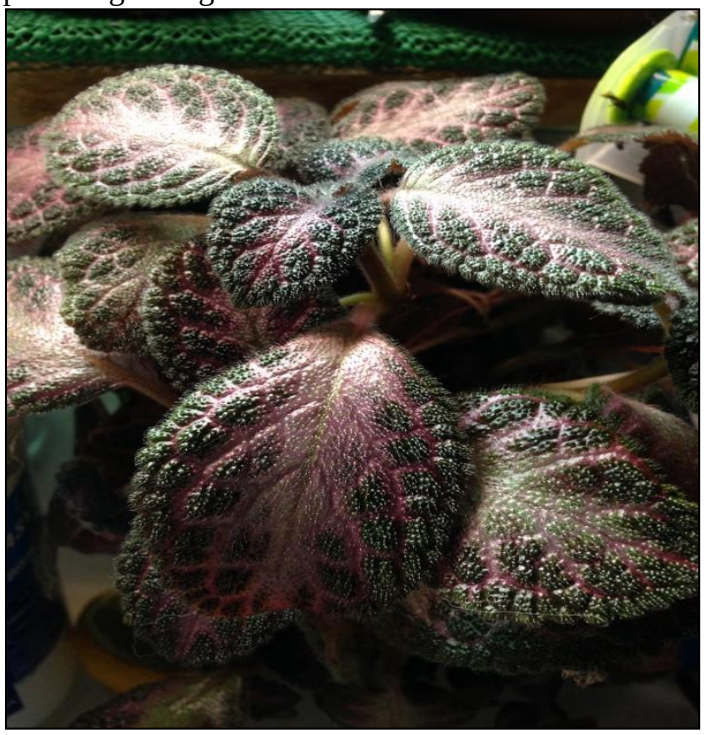
3. Water: Evenly moist, Not Wet

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 and one daylight bulb with the Episcias placed 4" – 6" from the tubes for 14-16 hours a day. North East and East windows also provide good light.



Donna's NOID *Episcia* has a pink tinge.

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 solons 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. 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.

Episcia 'Strawberry Patch' – grown by Carol Hamelink

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. 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

Episcia 'Unpredictable Valley'

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 !!!

Bloomin' Now

Barb's: This is my unnamed *Primulina Dryas* that has been trying to bloom for at least 2 years. It always has buds, but they never fully develop. I took it off the light stand and it has sat neglected on the dining room table for months. I finally put it in a window that had been vacated by a house plant that went outside for the summer, and it has at last bloomed! This is a large variety with a diameter of about 21 inches. It propagates easily and I have given away and sold many babies. I wonder if anyone else has difficulty getting this variety to bloom and what tricks they may have used to encourage blooming. I also have difficulty blooming other large Primulinas such as Moonlight and Chiaki.

Donna's *Achimenes* Noid bought from convention sale table as mixed rhizomes

Episcia 'Thad's Tropical Nights'

Barb's *Episcia* 'Fanny Haague'
I restarted a lot of my Episcias in June and put them in gallon Ziploc bags to root; however, it appears they did not get enough light in the bags even thought they were on my usual Episcia shelf with two T-12 bulbs, so they are all leggy. Tip: do not leave them in the bags too long and give them stronger light.

Barb's *Primulina* 'Chastity'

Growing Episcias for Maximum Blooming

By Andrew Norris

Growing Episcias for Maximum Blooming By Andrew Norris I am no Episcia expert, in fact, I only started to try growing them seriously in May of 2012. What I can offer in this article is how I grow them and what they seem to like in my growing situation. The *Episcia* 'Show Time', I exhibited in our September show at the University of Delaware, was a mere stolon gleaned from an African Violet Club friend's show plant this past May! Evidently, the *Episcias* are fond of my methods and what I have to say will bring you great success with your *Episcias*.

I want to cover lighting and temperature first, since to me, those two things are closely related and the most important factors in successful growing. My plants are grown about 6-8" from one T8 40 watt 3000k bulb and one 40 watt T12 6500k bulb. My bulbs are a few years old and what I have found with t8's is that they are too intense for my plants. I was primarily a violet grower until the fall show, which are better suited to the less light hungry plant's needs, after a year or more of burn in time. I usually buy t8 bulbs in lower wattages now and don't bother with the 3000k bulbs, just sticking to two 6500k bulbs. For those wondering, a very simplified explanation of "k", relating to light bulbs, is the color temperature of the bulb in degrees Kelvin. The higher the k rating, the more blue rays are emitted, the lower the k rating, the more red. A Kelvin rating of 6,500 is your closest representation of sunlight, encompassing the colors in the proportions given off by the sun, at the equator, at noon. It is thought that red spectrums help with flowering and blue/green spectrums are best for foliage. The same results are found by the use of one cool and one warm white bulb as using the 6,500k bulbs. Since sunlight is certainly adequate, I find the use of anything other than 6,500k bulbs to be obsolete. I still have some 3000k bulbs in use, so mention them, since I just choose not to replace them until they are no longer adequate. Lights run between 9-12 hours, 10 in this case.

Episcia 'Pink Acajou'

I grow my *Episcias* on the top shelf of my stands. This is the warmest location, benefiting from the heat rising from the ballast below and the lights above them. They receive temps of about 76-78F, with lights running and down to 65F, at the lowest, with the bulbs off. I run my lights at night, keeping cost down by having cooler temps during summer's daytime heat and warmer temps during winter's frosty nights. This also helps win the battle with powdery mildew, during mildew seasons.

Episcia 'Silver Dust'

Episcias like it warmer, but also don't resent a drop to the low 60sF, at night. I run an ultrasonic humidifier, on low, just so you can barely see the output, all year round. While I don't measure the humidity, I can tell you that over 300 plants and the humidifier running, means no static electricity building up in my 1 bedroom apartment! After light and temperature, the next most important item is the soil mix. I have struggled with my wicking mix for the 4 years I have been growing violets and gesneriads. The pH was a sneaky problem and one hard to measure, hard to understand, and hard to solve. Many gesneriads grow on limestone, but still want a slightly acid pH, while others seem to require lime.

I try every plant in the mix I will give you here, only adding a pinch of lime for gesneria and Chinese terrestrials, so far with great success. My mix is a base of a 10 quart bag of Burpee eco friendly Seed Starting Mix. It is coir based, which was not something I was looking for, but also decided, isn't bad either. Burpee test their products, so the problems of other coir products is eliminated, with some considerations. Epsoma has a similar, suitable product, which may or may not be coir based. To this, I add 1 1/3 cup of Epsoma Holly Tone, and about 60% 1/4"-1/2" perlite. Holly Tone lowers the pH and provides a biologically active mix. Which is working in my favor, I don't know, but since switching to this formulation, my violets are superior and my plants are better than ever before.

It has been about a year since the switch and other than finding a less visible alternative to perlite, I am very pleased with my results. I will add that this mix test out to a very low 5.5, but with 7.0 watering and Miracid as a fertilizer, it stabilizes quickly to around 7.0 in a short time. No plants have resented the mix so far and my testing equipment is also, not the greatest, being a simple probe from a Lowes shelf. Watering and fertilizing is next on the list. Watering here is by wick, once the plants are established. My water is 7.0 in pH and I collect it from a mountain spring to avoid the additives in city water. I fertilize with Miracid (the azalea, camellia, rhododendron formulation, by Miracle Grow is the same), at 1/16th a tsp per gallon, every watering.
On occasion, I also add a few drops of Super Thrive. I wait until a newly potted plant needs its reservoir refilled (I wick on individual deli containers), before fertilizing, to allow for the fertilizers in the Holly Tone and Seed Starting Mix to be used. Finally, it's the artistry of growing show plants! Here are some

tips on the grooming, potting, and shaping of the plants into a specimen that is not just well grown, but worthy of display. Most stolons should start in a 3" or 4" pot. They will quickly move up a pot size, often in a few weeks or month.

While the stolon grows, I remove all marred, dying, or unattractive leaves and stolons. I continue to remove stolons until the main plant is well established. I then allow stolons to grow, allowing 3 at the most and removing any leaves that crowd or block light from the stolons. I place the stolons evenly inside the pot, rooting them in place and leaving them attached to the mother plant. When you no longer have room to place your stolons, or they are crowded, pot up to a 5" or 6" pan pot. I resume and keep pinching off stolons, until the pot is full of large, robust plants. I then allow a few to trail over until my sense of aesthetics is achieved. Continue removing over lapping leaves and potting up to accommodate the larger crowns, eventually into an 8"-10" pot.

A maximum of 5 stolons will provide a full pot without appearing crowded and then, one or two stolons from each established crown can be allowed to trail over and gain some size. Too many stolons allowed to trail will rob the roots of the plant's energy for flowering and detract to the judges. Flowering should have begun in your 5"-6" pot and will continue indefinitely. Remove spent flowers and leaves every few days, as the blooms are short-lived and can get messy, if not tended to. I will add that new plants are best started from stolons, as I have found many varieties to slow or cease stolon production at flowering size. Always have a non-flowering stolon to continue with for best results. Hope you find my methods helpful and I hope to see some bloom covered *Episcias*, gracing our future show tables.

Episcia 'Thad's Yellow Bird'

Summer's Flower: Dolichos lablab alba

On another subject, summer brings the joy of so many blooms outside that grow using the sun's energy instead of our indoor florescent and LED lights we use for our Gesneriads. A plant I enjoy growing is known by many names such as Hyacinth Bean, Australian Pea, and Poor Man's Bean which is native to Africa. With special water changes while cooking, the seeds (beans) are edible, and the leaves can be cooked like spinach; however, in the USA the Hyacinth Bean is grown for ornamental purposes.
I grow this vining plant along side of my garage from starter plants I grow from seeds sown indoors. But they can be very easily grown from seed plants directly into the ground. The seeds are large and easy to handle. I shall bring some to the meeting to share. There is a variety with purple blooms that is more common but I prefer the white. Lightly fragrant also!

Donna' *Dolichos lablab alba*

NCAC Meeting Program Schedule for 2016

September 2016: Episcias: Varieties, Culture, and botanical History, presented by Jim Roberts

October 2016: Karyn Cichocki will discuss her Gesneriad Collecting Trip to Ecuador. Nominating panel for election of new officers will be determined.

November 2016: Jim Roberts discussing setting up grow light stands.

December 2016: Holiday Party
New officers are elected

2017 Program Suggestions:
January – Growing in Feather Rock. Many Gesneriads grow directly on rock in the wild. That's not an easy way to grow Gesneriads in the home, but Feather Rock makes it relatively easy. The rock absorbs moisture for the plant and provides lots of air around the root system. Primulina, Petrocosmea and Streptocarpus make perfect candidates for growing in rock. Tufa and volcanic rock are also excellent for this type of planting, but are a bit more difficult to find.

February – Propagation Workshop. Our traditional winter meeting. Everyone is asked to bring in plants that can be shared and planted in preparation for our Sales at the Spring show. Rhizomes, tubers, seedlings that need to be separated, and fibrous plants with lots of extra growth. The Chapter will provide the soil mix and containers.

March – Kohleria. A simple to grow rhizomatous plant with lots of variety in the species available to work with and a tremendous selection of hybrids. There's something for everyone's growing space with the genus.

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