

PETAL TONES



Volume 49 Number 9

September 2018



Dave's *Achimenes misera* in full bloom!

President's Message

This summer has certainly flown by. The convention was great, and I have lots of new gesneriads to grow and seeds to plant. In addition to the never-ending job of repotting indoor plants, this wet summer has really given my gardens a boost. Since our program this month is on *Streptocarpus*, I checked my shelves to see how my streps are doing. They have been blooming all summer, as evidenced by lots of spent blossoms, some of which reveal seed pods (more seeds to plant!). One of my favorites is a fantasy blossom called "Jules". This one has produced seed pods before, but the seeds didn't sprout (probably too old when I planted them). I will try again with fresh seeds and see what I get. Meanwhile, the plant has grown big and needs to be divided, so look for some on the raffle table. Hope to see you there!

Barbara

MEETING LOCATION:

Emmanuel United Methodist Church
10755 Scaggsville Road, Laurel, MD 20723
We gather at 10am to get set up, with the meeting beginning at 10:30am. Meet the second Saturday of the month. Calendar yearly dues of \$10 are due in January or whenever joining. Renew by March to keep your Petal Tones subscription.

September 8th: *Streptocarpus* with Brian Connor

October 13th: Mini *Sinningias* with Pat Bowling

November 17th: Growing *Smithianthas* and *Eucodonias*

December : Holiday Party TBA



Streptocarpus 'Jules'

Streptocarpus

Brian Connor

People often tell beginners to grow *Streptocarpus* or some other gesneriad “just like African violets (AVs).” Well there are many similarities but there are some differences. Good bright light is essential if you want flowers. Streps, like AVs, can reward you with blossoms at any time. If culture is good, some hybrids will bloom much of the year under artificial light, although plants may take a break and slow down for 6-12 weeks in winter (sometimes a briefer period in summer also). Most cultural problems are associated with watering once the proper light is found.

LIGHT: *Streptocarpus* requires light similar to but better than AVs. For natural light that means an EAST or WEST window. A SOUTH window may be too strong and require sheer curtains or the plants can be placed several feet back from the window. A NORTH window is usually not sufficient, but I once had a NORTHEAST window on the 5th floor of an apartment building where my Streps thrived. Windows can vary and may be obstructed by trees or buildings, so you will have to experiment to find that happy spot for your plants.

I have started supplementing natural light with a few hours of light from a single T-5 fluorescent bulb. The light is on a couple of hours BEFORE or AFTER the window is bright with sunlight. This ensures that plants get some good light on cloudy days.

Many excellent growers rely completely on artificial light. Two T-8 fluorescent bulbs that are on for 11-12 hours can grow healthy, blooming Streps. T-5 fluorescent lights can also be excellent for *Streptocarpus*, although I find T-5 excessive and too strong for standard African violets. There are two simple ways to control artificial light: 1. Length of time the lights are on 2. Distance the plants are placed from lights. I have heard of people using 3-4 tube T-8 fluorescent lights instead of 2, but I have found this too much light for my Streps, although it may be a good set-up for high light gesneriads like some of the *Sinningia* species. One experienced Strep grower that I know uses two T-12's and moves the plants closer to the lights and increases the time the lights are on before flower shows.

Many people are experimenting successfully with LED lights, which are more environmentally friendly than fluorescent tubes. LED lights can be used as ribbon strips that are attached to shelves or retro-fit tubes that are placed in T-8 or T-5 fluorescent light fixtures. This is a topic in itself, but here is one interesting “How to” article: <http://renovatedfaith.com/.../grow-african-violets-with-led/>

TEMPERATURE: *Streptocarpus* prefer normal household temperatures, 65-80 degrees F. A 5-10 degree in temperature at night can be beneficial, but is not required. Constant temperatures above 85 F are detrimental. *Streptocarpus* can survive quite well at temperatures down to 50 F (and even lower). The plants will slow down and stop growing at temperature extremes outside their preferred range. At high or very low temperatures, please water very carefully.

WATER: Watering is where most people run into trouble with their plants. Streps like very light, even moisture but hate soggy soil and “wet feet” even more so than AVs. If you are watering by hand, let the soil *surface* go dry. The soil should not be bone dry before the plant drinks again. However, if in doubt, it is better to wait a day. Most of the time Streps recover from a severe wilt. They will not recover from consistent overwatering or inconsistent watering (overwatering then under watering multiple times). Paradoxically, Streps lend themselves beautifully to self-watering methods with one important consideration. The soil mix **MUST** be very well aerated. If wicking, using capillary matting, Oyama pots, etc., one **MUST** use a soil mix with a very high percentage of drainage material (typically perlite).

SOIL MIX: As suggested above, the soil mix is dependent on how you water. If watering by hand, the classic 1:1:1 mix (1 part each sphagnum peat, perlite, vermiculite) is a good choice. Some people no longer use vermiculite so an easy variation would be 2 parts PRO-MIX or PRO-MIX HP with one part perlite. Other soil mixes, for instance coir based, can also be substituted for the PRO-MIX, if you like. Depending on pH of water and soil, some add dolomite lime to the soil. A small amount of animal manure (the odorless kind)

can benefit *established* plants, with the organic material not more than 3-5% of the soil mix.

NOTE: A few Russian/Ukrainian hybrids do not like the addition of the organics and are referred to as Salt Sensitive. Some growers have used good quality long fiber sphagnum moss for Salt Sensitive Streps. If wick watering, using self-watering pots (Oyama or ceramic) or capillary matting, I find it preferable to use a soil mix with at least 50% perlite. Here is my current "*Streptocarpus* Wicking/Oyama" soil mix: 2 parts Pro-Mix or Milled Sphagnum Moss, 2 parts small perlite, 2 parts medium perlite, 1 part horticultural charcoal. It sounds crazy, but it is only about 30% peat or sphagnum and 70% drainage material (mostly perlite). With a soil mix this light and lean, a very dilute fertilizer must be added to the water reservoirs, at about 1/8 strength. I am currently growing in OYAMA pots mostly.

FERTILIZER: Strength of fertilizer will depend on how you water and how often you wish to feed your plants. If you are hand watering, you could fertilize at every watering at 1/8 strength (some dilute closer to ¼ strength). If you fertilize much less frequently, you can concentrate the fertilizer some, but not more than ¼ to half strength. When wick watering or using Oyama pots, add dilute fertilizer at 1/8 strength to the water. This is important because the soil is very lean and the plants need a source of N, P, K as well as Calcium, Magnesium and trace elements.

Decide on a couple of good fertilizers and rotate them. Dyna-Gro Foliage-Pro (9-3-6) is an excellent, reliable fertilizer for *Streptocarpus*. Honestly, many AV or orchid fertilizers can be used. Better Gro Orchid Plus (20-14-13) is very good and widely available at garden centers. I have used Miracle Gro Tomato fertilizer (18-18-21) and Fox Farm Grow Big (6-4-4) in the past successfully. Algoflash Orchid (4-6-6) has been reported as a good foliar spray for seedlings/young plants. In the past 7-8 years most growers suggest it is best to avoid regular use of high phosphorous fertilizers. Over 10 years ago when I first started collecting Streps; I did use a 10-30-20 and then Better Gro Orchid Better-Bloom 11-35-15 on rare occasions before flower shows. My plants did not die and I did notice an increase in blooms with just 1 or 2 applications. However, older leaves became pale and yellowed. Constant use of high phosphorous fertilizers with P over 30 to bloom boost will cost you leaves eventually! If you insist on using them to prepare for a flower show, be sparing (use once or at most twice), leach the soil regularly and re-pot the plant in fresh soil mix after the flower show. Do **NOT** ever use the Super Bloom Boosters with P over 50 such as 10-52-10 [I have a story to share at my talk about this], etc.

Reverse Osmosis (RO) water and rain water have no salts, so RO specific fertilizer should be used with these water sources. Jacks Orchid RO Water Soluble powder 12-3-15-7-2 (the 7 is Calcium and the 2 is Magnesium) is one example.

A small minority of Russian/Ukrainian hybrids are sensitive to fertilizer salts and organics or manure-based fertilizers should be avoided within this sub-group of Russian/Ukrainian hybrids. DS Aphrodisiac is a notorious example.

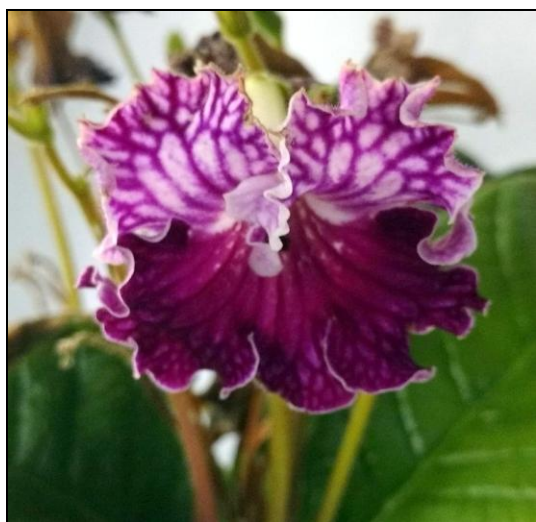
REPOTTING: Streps like being root bound. Healthy Streps like to be re-potted and groomed. When grooming, remove the oldest leaf/leaves that will never bloom again to stimulate new growth. Many Streps can be grown with more than one crown, but too many crowns can deplete the strength of the plant. You may need to remove some crowns occasionally or divide and re-pot the plant. The Dimetris Group (DS) has an informative table of their hybrids that includes recommendations for the number of crowns (rosettes) for each hybrid: <http://streptocarpus-dimetris.com/catalog-en/index.php>

In a perfect world most actively growing Streps could be re-potted 3 times a year. My horticultural reality is sometimes not ideal and two times a year will suffice. Re-potting at least once a year is a necessity, otherwise the soil pH will likely go awry. My bad horticultural twin on 1-2 occasions has allowed a plant to go 2 years or more without re-potting. In such case, the older leaves may start to develop yellow haloes, showing a failure to absorb Nitrogen properly. So, repot those *Streptocarpus* in fresh soil mix on occasion!!

PESTS: I have not had too much trouble with insects and Streps, but foliar and root mealy bugs, thrips and mites are the most likely threats. I have never seen aphids, white fly or scale on *Streptocarpus*. I know aphids are possible. Treat early and isolate new or infected plants. Neem oil spray is generally a good first line of chemical defense. Foliar mealy bugs can be picked off or sprayed with insecticidal soaps or Neem if the infestation is early. I have used Imidacloprid or Marathon for soil mealy bugs, but I am trying to avoid insecticides. There is a lot of literature on how to get rid of thrips, too much to discuss in depth here. First disbud all plants (Ouch!!!), then treat. Mites are often sprayed with Avid, but Neem is worth a try. Sometimes you may have to consider discarding an infected plant (Ouch!!!). Neem can inhibit fungus or powdery mildew as well. Immunox or Copper sprays can be used for serious fungal infection. Again, you may have to consider discarding a badly infected plant. A plant with suspected viral infection should be trashed.

NEW HYBRIDS: We are going to discuss *Streptocarpus* culture on Saturday, Sept 8 for a bit and also see a lot of pictures of new *Streptocarpus* hybrids. Many remarkable *Streptocarpus* plants have emerged in the last 5-10 years from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and elsewhere. The new hybridizers keep coming. Some of the plants are amazing, but they are not always equally floriferous and must be evaluated. I am completely infatuated with the flashy new creations, but the old, tried and true hybrids with simpler flowers should not be neglected. By making good choices, you can create a beautiful display of flowering plants with just a few Streps, consisting of new and old hybrids, depending on your personal preference.

Bloomin' Now



Barb's *Gloxinia* 'Dragonsong' & *Streptocarpus* 'Lena'



Dave's *Achimenes* 'Purple King'



Barb's *Streptocarpus* 'Keigetsu'



Vicki Burke Carr's *Achimenes* 'Sauline' & 'Peach Glow'



Dave's *Seemannia sylvatica*



Dave's *Sinningia* 'Mark Twain'



Dave's *Sinningia* 'Cindy Ella'



Donna's x*Glokoheria* 'Goblin'. This was labeled 'Rosea' when I received it but found out a year later that is really is 'Goblin'.



Donna's x*Smithcodonia* 'Heartland's Joy'



Dave's *Sinningia macropoda* seedling's blooms



Dave's Mini *Sinningia* NOID seedling



Kitty's *Saintpaulia* 'Lituanika', a semi-miniature trailer with an unusual two-toned double blossom



Bill's beautiful *xSmithcodonia* 'Heartland's Joy'

Desperately Seeking

Donna.....*Eucodonia andrieuxii* 'Wooly Morrion'



Kitty's *Sinningia* 'Apricot Bouquet' grown outdoors



Kitty's *Saintpaulia* "Rob's Boolaroo", a semi-miniature trailer. The close-up of the blossoms shows the purple fantasy. The plant itself is twelve inches in diameter. Magnificent!



Kitty's *Achimenes* 'Purple King'



Barb's Blue Ribbon winner: Bottle Garden at convention !



MAAVS 2018 Convention and Show!
Radisson Hotel in Camp Hill, PA
"Violets and the Chocolate Factory"
November 8 – 10, 2018
More information: <https://www.maavs.org/>



Congratulations to Bill Schmidt who went to his first Gesneriad Convention this summer and won first prize and Best Old World gesneriad for his *Saintpaulia* 'Tiny Woodland Trail'. Perfection!

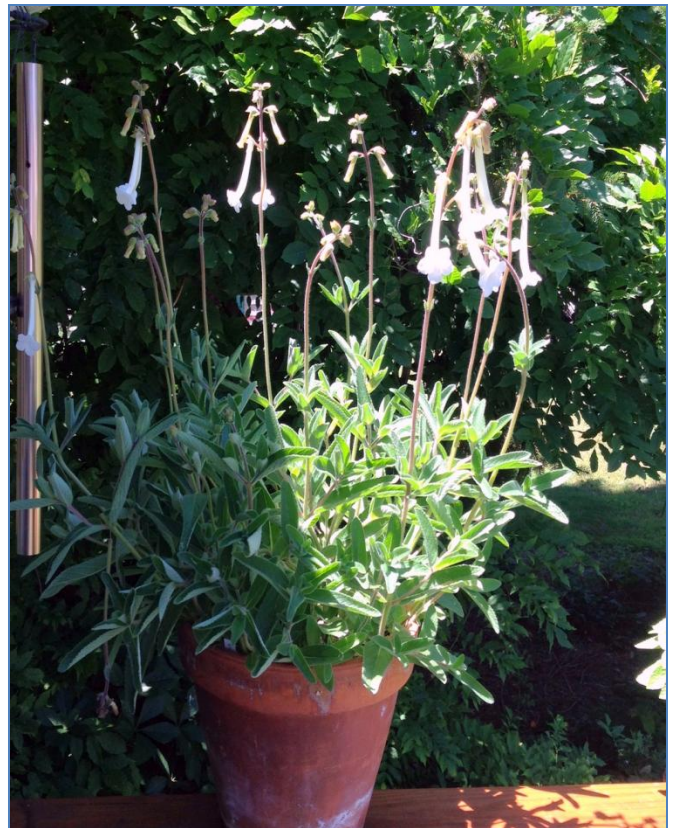


Donna's Mini *Sinningia* 'Grable'



Bright Eyes
Tetraploid Form - Pat Bowling

Pat's sharing her expertise with us at the October meeting!



Donna's *Sinningia tubiflora*



Brian's photo of *Streptocarpus* 'Bristol's Sixth Sense' a plant at the convention.



Brian's photo of *Streptocarpus* 'HCY Taurus' a plant at the convention



Brian's photo of *Streptocarpus* 'DS Little Plushy Arctic Fox' a plant at the convention.



Kitty's *Streptocarpus* 'Wow'

Programs Planned for 2018

January 13th: Designs Basic with Barb Stewart

February 10th: Sinningia seminar Jim Roberts

March 10th: Dog Show and Culture

April 21st: Joy of Growing Summer Sinningias

May 12th: Propagation Meeting with Jim Roberts

June 9th: Road trip to US Botanic Gardens, DC

July: No meeting, National Convention
Update: Summer Picnic July 14th at Johanna's

August 11th: No Meeting

September 8th: Streptocarpus with Brian Connor

October 13th: Pat Bowling: Mini Sinningias

November 10th: Webinar on Eucodonia and Smithianthas

December 8th: Holiday Party

Plant of the Month

September : Streptocarpus

October : Mini Sinningias

November: Nautilocalyx

December : Aeschynanthus

DON'T FORGET THE RAFFLE TABLE!

At every meeting our members bring extra plants, cuttings, supplies donate them to the raffle table. Tickets for the raffle are only 3 for a dollar and everyone who attends the meeting gets one ticket just for showing up (including guests). Here's what you'll see on the table at a meeting:

Gesneriad plants, rhizomes, tubers, cuttings, seeds, companion and/or garden plants, cuttings, magazines, pamphlets , pots and gardening supplies.

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Membership: Jim Roberts
Ways and Means: Brian Connor
Show: Jim Roberts

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Victor Nicholas
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Ki Imai

NCAC website: www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org
web@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

NCAC Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/174442276299173/?ref=bookmarks>

The National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society welcomes all interested Gesneriad growers. The most familiar Gesneriad is Saintpaulia, more commonly known as the African Violet.

Dues are \$10 per year (email copy of current year's newsletter).

Back issues from previous years available on website. Membership runs the calendar year and can be pro-rated.

The international Gesneriad Society is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to the study, growing and enjoyment of the gesneriaceae. Membership dues are \$25 /year for individuals and \$26 for a family. Benefits include seed fund of hard-to-find plants, reference materials, yearly convention & cultural webinars.

Membership requests should be sent to
Bob Clark, 1122 E Pike Street, PMB 637, Seattle, WA
98122-3916.

Membership includes a subscription to the society journal, Gesneriads.

<http://www.gesneriadsociety.org/>

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