

Basic Growing of African Violets

by

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You've bought an African Violet from a big box store and several months later it has quit blooming and looks on the verge of dying. What went wrong? How can we do better? Just what do these things want anyway?

Soil - There are many formulations for soil. You have a handout of some of them. Buy African Violet premade soil from the big box stores and you may not be getting what you want. That soil will benefit from the addition of perlite. 2/3 AV soil with about 1/3 perlite would improve it. Our own AV vendors have excellent soils available.

- Soil is "alive". It is not static. With time it will break down and become more acidic. Frequent repotting is beneficial to the plant to prevent a pH shift and the soil from becoming too acidic.
- Soil Compaction occurs over time also. Repotting is the answer for this too.
- So, good soil from a reputable source, and frequent repotting will put you on the right track for success.

Water- Not too hot, not too cold. The "Goldilocks" type of room temperature water will be just right.

- City water - Allow to sit for 12 or more hours to prevent chlorine and fluorine damage to the plants. This will also allow the water to come to room temperature.
- Well water - Have it tested for its suitability for use on plants.
- Softened water - do not use it on plants. No way!
- Reverse Osmosis water - good to use. It contains nothing but water and is pharmacologically pure.

- Types of watering - top watering/bottom watering/reservoir watering with a wick/ reservoir watering using diapers/ tray watering/Texas Style watering and Modified Texas Style watering. Enough?
- In any case water just till soil is damp throughout then don't water until it almost dries out. Then water again. Don't let it get too wet and don't let it get too dry. Hummm... another "Goldilocks" thing.

Light - I use florescent lights. I position the plants 12 inches under the lights for Standards, 9 inches for Semiminiatures and Miniatures. My lights burn for about 8 hours. I also have, in some instances, 4 tubes running on a 2' X 4' shelf instead of the usual 2 tubes. And my plant room has lots of windows. Watch your plants and if they seem to be reaching up towards the light then move them closer to the lights. If they seem to be clinging down around the pot then move them further away. For window sill growing remember to turn your plants a third of a turn 2 or 3 times a week to even out the distribution of light over time. Don't put them into direct sun - cover that window with a sheer curtain. Watch for cold drafts.

Temperature - Basically, if you are comfortable then they are comfortable. Temperatures of between 65 degrees and 75 degrees are optimum. At 45 degrees the plant will die.

Fertilizers - Lots of good ones. For Peter's 20-20-20 and the 12-34-14 type fertilizers use a scant 1/8 teaspoon per gallon of water. Water with this very dilute fertilizer at every watering. This provides a steady supply of good food to the plant. Over fertilizing is a real no, no.

What violets want you to do most is.....

Repot...Repot...Repot.

Repot every 4-6 months for Semiminiatures and Miniatures. (Optimum is every 3-4 months.)

Repot Standards every year, at least. (Optimum is every 4-6 months.)

Grooming For Standards, Semiminiatures and Miniatures go for Symmetry.

- Growth should have the leaves going out like the spokes of a wheel.
- Growth comes in sets of three leaves.

- Remove spent blossoms.
- Remove discolored or dead leaves.
- Remove any suckers.
- Dust the plant with a 1" paintbrush to remove dirt and dust (and cat hair).
Do so very gently.
- Wash the plant under a gentle stream of water. Tilt the plant sideways and gently stroke the leaf from the base to the outer edge. I said Gently!!
- Let dry completely if putting it back in a window.. It can go under florescent lighting immediately.

For trailers go for Form.

- Trailers must have a minimum of three crowns. But, more is better. Way better!!
- Remove spent blossoms and discolored or dead leaves.
- To increase the number of crowns, and thereby the fullness, remove all leaves except the terminal 3-6. New crowns will form because light has been allowed to reach the old stems.
- Picks can be used - gently - to move the old crowns into a desired new position. Leaves will grow and stabilize these new positions so that the picks can be removed in about three months.

Repotting Standards, Semiminiatures and miniatures. Instructions here will also work some for trailers.

- Groom the plant. Remove spent blossoms, old leaves, and suckers. Work on symmetry or form.
- Prepare the appropriate sized pot by putting a label on it, a wick in it if used, and a layer of slightly moist soil in the bottom of the pot. Pot should be 1/3 the measurement of the leafspan. So, a 12" plant goes into a 4" pot. This pot size does not hold for trailers.
- Remove the plant from its old pot and inspect the roots and soil. You want healthy roots and no evidence of pests.
- Cut off the bottom layer of soil equal to the depth of the new soil layer in the new pot plus any neck.
- "Dust the Shoulders" .

- Put the plant in the middle of the new prepared pot and, using a postcard, fill in with more soil.
- "Knock Three Times"
- Use a support ring, aka. "The Bra", to help establish symmetry. Use fiberglass hardware cloth under leaves when the support ring is larger than the span of leaves on the plant.
- Allow the newly repotted plant to sit for 2-3 hours. Then bottom water with plain tepid water for another 2-3 hours. Then it is ready to put back into your lighting. Water with plain tepid water, no fertilizers, for 2 weeks.
- You can use 2-3 drops of Superthrive per gallon of water to water with for these two weeks.

How to Start a Leaf Cutting

- Select a leaf that is middle aged.
- Cut the stem (petiole) at a slant. Leave the stem just long enough to keep the leaf upright in a pot.
- Put the prepared leaf into soil - not water. Water the soil.
- You can tent or not tent but tenting seems to work best for me.
- Eventually, hopefully, in two or three months you will see the start of babies.

Potting up the babies

- Separate each Mother leaf into it and it's babies.
- Remove the Mother leaf and separate the babies.
- Pot each one individually.
- Tent or not to tent - it's up to you.
- Great - more violets! Trade anyone?

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Restarting a plant from a crown Why?

- In the case of an 'Ostrich' neck.
- Make more plants such as chimeras.
- If a plant has a Mealie Bug infestation.

How ?

- Cut the crown off of the plant. Do this above the soil line.
- Remove all but about 6 leaves.
- Cut the stalk relatively short, perhaps 3/4", and gently scrape old leaf scars off.
- Put the crown into the center of a prepared pot.
- Tent for one month, then remove the tent gradually.

So you want to make babies?

Don't repot a pregnant Mom.

- For variegated babies Mom has to be variegated.
- Quite simply; 1. remove the yellow part (anther) with tweezers, etc. 2. cut it open with really sharp scissors 3. put the yellow powdery stuff that's in it (pollen) on the pokey-up part (stigma) of either the same blossom or another blossom.
- Fertilization has probably occurred when the bottom of the pokey-up part swells (ovary).
- When the stem of where the ovary is (pedicel) turns brown and appears dried out, in about 4 months or more, the seeds are ready.
- Seeds are very tiny. Very tiny indeed.
- Prepare Jiffy Peat pellets. Allow them to expand in water. Squeeze almost dry. Remove the netting cover and crumble into a container. I use a 16 oz. potato salad type deli container.
- Open the seed pod carefully over a piece of creased white paper.
- There could be as many as 400 seeds! Sow them sparingly. Cover.

Growing up baby

- If germination has occurred wait till the seedlings are large enough to handle and transplant into a covered community tray. Grab the little plant by a leaf and lift it up with a toothpick etc. When a bit larger transplant again into another covered container.
- When they have grown large enough transplant into an individual pot - still covered - and slowly uncover the young plants over a period of 2-3 weeks to get them used to open air.

wait.....wait.....wait....repot....wait....wait....wait

And then-----

The First Bloom

It is gorgeous and congratulations,

You are a Hybridizer!!

The best sources of information on African Violets can be found on the internet. Google AVSA for top information in the world of African Violets. Googling will also provide numerous sources for information on any subject about growing African Violets and keeping them happy.

But, to have fun and share information and plants, join a local club.

Everyone's Mix is Different!

By Bob Clark

There are many different components that can be used in making our potting mix. Most African violet growers use a soil-less mix with main ingredients that are peat, perlite, and vermiculite.

There are many other ingredients that may be added, such as horticultural charcoal, dolomite lime, minerals, etc. I prefer a light mix, as I wick-water my African violets.

Here are recipes from other African violet growers. Remember that what works well for someone else, may not work for you. **Do not re-pot all of your collection into a new mix before trying it on just a few plants!**

Jean Ness' Mix

2 parts Metro Mix [good all purpose potting soil]
2 parts Jiffy Mix [seed starting mix]
4 parts perlite
1 part vermiculite
3 teaspoons of dolomite lime

Jude Neumann's Leaf Starter Mix

4 parts vermiculite
2 parts milled sphagnum moss
1 part perlite
1/2 part horticultural charcoal

Kathy Lahti's Favorite Potting Medium

3 parts Premier Pro-Mix "BX"
2 parts perlite
1 part vermiculite

Dick & Marty Anderson's Mix

7 cups Sunshine LC-1 mix
8 cups coarse perlite
1/2 cup Canadian peat
1/2 cup vermiculite

Pauline Bartholomew's Mix from *Growing To Show*

5 quarts dry peat moss [fluffed]
4 quarts #2 perlite
3 quarts vermiculite
1 cup charcoal [optional]
1 tablespoon Super phosphate 0-20-0
Dolomite lime

Hortense Pittman's "Texas" Formula

5 gallons sterilized fine peat moss
5 gallons coarse horticultural grade vermiculite
2 1/2 gallons coarse horticultural grade perlite
1 cup crushed horticultural grade charcoal
5 quarts of water
1 cup of pulverized dolomite lime
1 teaspoon frittered trace elements

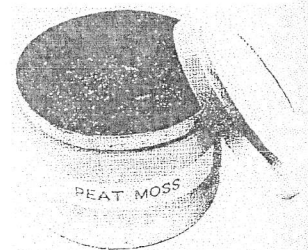
Marie Burns' "Show" Mix

5 gallons Baccto African violet soil
3 gallons coarse horticultural grade perlite
2 gallons coarse horticultural grade vermiculite
1 gallon fine peat moss
6 cups horticultural grade charcoal
1 cup dehydrated cow manure
10 tablespoons of dolomite lime
2 tablespoons Ferbam

Fisher's Soil Formula from Canada

8 quarts sphagnum peat moss [screened to remove sticks or buy fine screened]
2 quarts sterilized clay loam [garden loam or top soil]
2 quarts perlite
2 quarts medium or coarse vermiculite
2 quarts fine chip horticultural charcoal
Mix separately the following: 1 cup bone meal
1 cup calcium carbonate or powdered dolomite lime
1 tablespoon Fermate or Ferbam
Combine all together with about half a gallon of water.

As you can see, there are many different recipes for potting mix. I think it is fun to experiment to see if someone else's mix or elements from their mix might work for my plants. After all, if it works for them, perhaps it would work for me as well.



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