

# Renew Your Hobby Vows

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Susan began growing African violets in 1992. She likes edged blossoms, loves starting new plants and enjoys sharing plants and talking about African violet culture with anyone who shows just a hint of interest in flowering houseplants.

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My African violet and gesneriad collection was nearly wiped out. When I finally pinpointed the cause of their demise, it was too late. What had caused the damage to my precious plants you may ask? Was it an insect infestation, sweeping disease or a period of sweltering heat? No! Even worse, it was caused by something only I could control, the human factors of time and interest, or should I say, a serious lack of both of them.

I have a new plan for the future and am renewing my hobby vows and invite you to join me and do the same. The picture perfect plants that result will be our reward.

In my opinion, there are two factors that are more important to the success of indoor plants than any other growing conditions and they are the grower's time and interest. I've read many articles about the proper care of African violets and noticed that few mention them. I believe that if growers invest too much time doting on their plants, overwatering or excess fertilizing can result. Being impatient with waiting for new growth or blooms to occur can lead to a grower making poor decisions about culture conditions. A heavy interest may lead growers to acquiring more plants than they can reasonably manage, which will lead to improper care and poor plant health. On the other hand, too little time spent caring for indoor plants can lead to infrequent and insufficient watering, inadequate grooming and repotting frequency. Pest problems may go unnoticed and get out of control. Lack of interest causes growers to spend minimal time and effort caring for plants, and the plants will suffer. When growers have the optimal level of interest in the hobby of growing African violets, they will make the required effort to learn about the needs of these plants (light, water, soil, fertilizer, humidity, etc.) They spend the required amount of time working with their collection to ensure the optimal health of all plants.

What can we, as hobby growers, do to ensure that we maintain our two human factors of time and interest at the optimal level? I have some ideas. Since time is a fixed dimension, I cannot offer many suggestions in this area, except to perhaps take time management train-

ing and apply what we learn. I am a mother of two with a full time job and am involved in many activities and am always short of time! However, I find that when I have enough interest in something, I am able to find time during my hectic life. I have focused my efforts on increasing and maintaining my interest by renewing my African violet vows.

Ask yourself these 3 questions: (*Write down your answers - this is very important, go get a pen and paper right now!*)

**1. What do you enjoy about growing African violets?** Are there some aspects of growing that you like more than others? What makes you happy about your hobby?

**2. What plants do you like to grow best?** Think of the plants that are your favourites. What are their common characteristics? For example, what leaf type, flower type, flower colour or gesneriad do you like to grow the best or admire most.

**3. What goals do you have for your African violet hobby?** Think forward to a period of approximately 6 months to 1 year. What do you hope to achieve? Is there a different gesneriad you'd like to try growing? Are you searching for a particular variety? Do you want to try a new watering method? Do you plan to modify your lighting? Are you considering growing for show? Are you interested in giving presentations about your hobby to your club or to other organizations?

Have you answered the above questions? If we clearly understand what we enjoy best about our hobby, we can focus our limited time and our efforts in the most effective way. We will be able to use a list of our favourite plants and plant characteristics to help us make decisions about our collection, for example which plants to discard and what new plants to bring home to add to our collection. We will have a list of goals so we can track our progress.

In case you are curious, here are my answers. If they inspire you to add to your answers please write down your additional responses.

### **1. The things I enjoy best about growing are:**

- starting new plants
- sharing plants with others
- talking about plants with others

### **2. My favorite plants are those with:**

- interesting foliage, can be variegated, ruffled
- double blossoms

- edged blossoms
- dark red/wine coloured blossoms

### **3. My goals for my hobby are:**

- Write an article for Chatter: (and if you are reading this now, I've achieved at least 1 of my goals and YOU will achieve yours too!)
- to only grow plants I enjoy now, not in the past, and not save for some distant future.
- to use decorative or at least uniform, nice looking pots.
- to control fungus gnats.
- to keep the number of the plants I am growing at a maximum of what can fit onto the 6 shelves I have.
- to regularly visit my AVs and take the time to assess each plant individually.

The next step to renew our African violet vows is to neatly print our answers in an attractive format, using pictures when possible, and post in a prominent location, for example, near our plants. Try to use more succinct language and use action-oriented phrases.

After posting our answers, let's vow to read them periodically to remind ourselves of the reasons why this wonderful hobby is important to us. We will be inspired to achieve the goals we have set. Let's share our goals with others, like friends, family and club members, as it is more likely we will succeed if our peers are involved.

One year from now, we will revisit our hobby vows. We will ask ourselves these follow-up questions:

**1) *How has my life changed since last year?***

**2) *What is my interest in my African violet hobby?***

**3) *How many of my African violet hobby goals did I achieve?***

We will celebrate all of our many achievements by sharing our news with others. I suggest that we will reward ourselves and our hobby with a treat like new plants or supplies. We will review any goals we did not complete and ask ourselves what prevented us from doing so. We will question what we can do differently to increase the likelihood that we will meet the goals in the following year, or modify the goals to suit our life at that time. Remember that our hobby needs to be enjoyable, not daunting.

Let's renew our African violet vows annually and we will have a mutually beneficial relationship for years to come!