



# The African Violet Society of Canada

## *Basic African Violet Culture*

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**African violets (Saintpaulia)** are truly the most popular of all flowering houseplants. Saintpaulia are not true violets, but are members of the Gesneriad (gez-NEER-ee-add) family which also includes other popular plants commonly known as 'Chocolate Soldier' (Episcia), 'Cape Primrose' (Streptocarpus), 'Goldfish Plant' or 'Flying Fish' (Columnea) 'Lipstick Vine' (Aeschynanthus), 'Gold Fish Plant, (Nemathanthus) and the Gloxinia. If you provide a few basic conditions it is possible to have your African violets blooming for you almost all year round.

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### *Light Requirements*

African violets can be comfortably grown on a windowsill that is neither dim nor overly bright. A north window is recommended in bright weather, and an east window, the rest of the time. Southern and western exposures are usually too bright for these plants. There should be no direct sunlight.

Few plants have adapted as well as the African violet to growing in artificial light conditions. They thrive under fluorescent light. Most if not all of the show plants you see in the shows of AVSC and our local affiliates were grown under fluorescent or LED lights. The tops of standard plants should be 30 cm. (12 in.) from the tubes. In the case of miniature and semiminiature plants that distance should be reduced to 25 cm. (10 in.). The lights should be on about 6-10 (LED) or 12-14 (fluorescent) hours per day. Fluorescent & LED tubes come in different colour types with names like cool white, warm white and many brand names for growth lights. African violets thrive under the cool whites which are the most reasonably priced. Some growers say they achieve better results by putting one cool white and one warm white in the same two-tube fixture. Others like to mix cool white and the much more expensive growth lamps. Ask an AVSC member for more information on using LED lights.



### *Watering*

Proper watering is necessary for the culture of any plant. Any drinkable water can be used and should be slightly warmer than room temperature. Do not use cold water and **never** use water from a water softener.



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Over watering can be as deadly as under watering. Water only when the top of the soil is dry to the touch. If watering from the top, water until it runs out the holes in the bottom of the pot into a saucer. Always try to use containers with proper drainage holes. **Do not allow your plants to sit in water!**

If you are bottom watering by filling the saucer, remove the excess water after the plant has drawn up sufficient moisture. Many growers like to wick their pots and sit them on reservoirs of water (margarine tubs work well), providing uniform moisture to the plant for up to several weeks. Nylon rug braiding material makes an excellent wick.



Take care not to allow water drops to remain on leaves or in the center of the crown. A paper towel will soak up any excess. Misting your plants using very warm water is helpful if the humidity is low.



### *Fertilizer*

Another essential for good growth and bloom is proper nutrients. African violets prefer a steady availability of fertilizer in small amounts. They like fertilizers ranging from one that has a balance N-P-K (nitrogen-phosphorous potassium) ratio such as 20-20-20 to one that is somewhat higher in phosphorus such as 12-36-14 or 15-30-15. No matter which formula you use it should have added micro-nutrients, particularly if you are using a soilless mix or one that is nearly soilless. These formulae are available in powder or granules. For African violets the granules should be added to the water at each watering at a rate of 1 ml. fertilizer per 4 litres of water (1/4 tsp. per gallon). The regimen is called “constant feed”.



### *Temperature*

African violets thrive in normal household temperatures. Daytime temperatures should be 21 to 27 °C. (70 to 80 °F) and nighttime temperatures should be 16 to 21°C (60 to 70 °F). Your home is probably within this range. Extremes of temperature will slow growth and present other problems.



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They can even cause death of the plants.

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### *Humidity*

The African violet's natural environment was quite humid. It does best where the humidity is between 40% and 70%. If it is necessary in the dry months, you can increase the humidity in the plant room with a portable humidifier or by placing the plants on trays filled with sterile gravel and water.

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### *Soil*

Your potting mix should be light to allow for the free passage of air and water. A “soil-less” mix, which is primarily peat moss with the addition of vermiculite &/or perlite, is a preferred growing medium. This combination requires a constant feed program and can dry out fairly quickly. Many growers will add 10 –20% actual rich soil to the mix to help retain moisture longer. There are many specialized soil-less mixes available on the market today.

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### *Pots*

The size of the pot depends on the size of your plant. The general rule is that the pot diameter should be around 1/3 the diameter of the plant. Miniatures should stay in a 65mm (2 1/2 in.) pot, and most standards will end up in a 101.6mm (4 in.) or 152.4mm (6 in.) pot. Plastic is best, but clay, glazed or ceramic pots can be used. Pots with holes in the bottom allow for excess water to escape and provide good drainage.

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### *Cleaning*

African violets breathe through their leaves. A soft natural hair brush is useful for removing soil particles. Gentle spraying with warm water or even holding your plant under the gentle flow of warm tap water, taking care not to wash away the soil from the pot. Allow the plants to dry off before returning to a window or bright light. Remove any accumulated water in the crown of the plant by using a soft paper towel and gently dabbing a corner into the centre of the plant.



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### *Pests and Diseases*

Pests are not usually a problem unless brought in from the garden, on cut flowers, or on new plants. Always isolate new plants for two months, and keep a close watch on them for signs of pests. Common pests such as foliar mealy bug and white fly, can be controlled safely with products available at your garden center. Mites, thrips, soil mealy bug and other may require the use of specific chemicals or insecticides. Remember that all pesticides are poison, and take very special care to read the directions on the manufacturer's label. Always keep chemicals and other dangerous products safely out of the reach of children and pets. If you suspect a serious pest problem, you should consult a good African violet book, a local garden center, or a member of the African Violet Society of Canada .

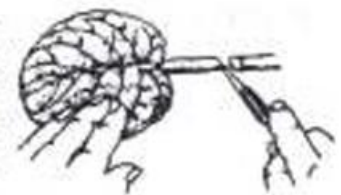
More information is available at: <http://www.avsc.ca/pests&diseases.htm>



### *Propagation*

Propagation of African violets is done by leaf, seed, sucker and peduncle.

Propagation of African violets to gain more plants of the same variety is normally done by leaf propagation. Leaf propagation is the most common and is an inexpensive way to add to your collection. If you acquire leaves with a damp piece of cotton or paper towel around the end of the stem, carefully remove the wrapping. Make a fresh new cut at an angle of 45 degrees with a very sharp knife or razor. Avoid using scissors, as they will crush the cells in the stem. Place the leaf in a small pot or container that has been filled with moistened coarse vermiculite. Use a label or stake to identify the variety name. To keep it moist during the first few weeks, the pot can sit in a saucer with a 6.25 mm (1/4 in.) of water or cover with a clear plastic bag.



After the leaf has rooted (a gentle tug will tell), keep the vermiculite damp. New plantlets may be seen sprouting from the base of the leaf in as soon as one month. Divide the plantlets, and pot them up as soon as you can safely handle them without causing damage. Do not separate variegated varieties from the mother leaf while they are still all white. They need to have green chlorophyll present in order to sustain them in their growth.



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The time may vary according to individual growing conditions and the variety of the plant. Be patient. Pot the new plantlets in your regular potting mix. Use your regular feeding program for the leaves and plantlets during this propagation procedure. Foliar feeding is especially helpful for fresh cut leaves. You could have a flowering plant as quickly as six months from the time you put the leaf down! Remember, growing them is half the fun.

For more information on propagation, visit: <http://www.avsc.ca/propagation.htm>

*Updated November 2024*