



UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Volumes of Violets

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This is a fun time of year – sort of. Although cold and (normally) snowy outside, plant people are itching to get our hands dirty – literally. I find that it is a great time to propagate African violets. Even though these plants can be somewhat challenging to keep long term, they are rather easy to propagate. When I have a “nursery” of young plants to care for, I tend to watch the adult plants more carefully and, therefore, they do better and last longer.

Keeping African violets is rather easy if you follow a few simple “rules”. First, the soil needs to be fast draining or plants will rot. Adding some extra perlite to regular houseplant mix works well or purchase specially formulated African violet medium. I have found that filling the saucer under the pot with water is the best way to hydrate the plants. Any water remaining after an hour or two can be discarded. Care should be taken to avoid getting water onto the leaves as this may cause disease problems.



A regular, dilute (quarter strength) feeding of African violet fertilizer works best, as opposed to periodic strong doses. They like bright light but will burn in direct sun. I have found them to thoroughly enjoy living under a table lamp or fluorescent lighting. Repot once a year by taking out as much of the dirt as possible and replacing it with fresh medium. If your house gets extremely dry during the winter, a pebble tray filled with water beneath the plant will help, as African violets like humidity. Space plants to ensure good air movement or use a small fan with large groups of plants in order to prevent fungal diseases.

To propagate African violets, you need a mature leaf from a healthy and well hydrated parent plant. Break off a leaf and make a neat cut on the end with a razor blade or hobby knife. Next, dip the end that you just cut into some rooting hormone (I prefer the powder type). Use small plastic pots, or 3 oz. plastic bathroom cups. You will need to poke a moderate hole in the bottom for drainage. Use the same potting mix described above. I like to take a pencil and poke a hole in the soil. This allows you to easily bury the stalk of the leaf, called the petiole, so that the blade is just above the surface. Care will need to be given to ensure the cutting does not dry out. If you are only propagating a few plants, you could loosely place a sandwich bag over each cup. For larger projects, a plant tray and a tall humidity dome with adjustable vents on the top and sides allows some air movement. The leaf cutting will sprout roots, and eventually will grow new baby plants.



Care for your young African violets is similar to the adults. Water when the surface is dry, but more often at the beginning before the roots form. Once the baby plants emerge from the soil, I start the diluted fertilizer regime. For some reason, wet leaves do not seem to be a problem when the plants are young, but try to minimize this as a precaution. They should be placed in bright light out of direct sun. Once the baby plants get big enough and start to spread their leaves horizontally, remove the dome/bag. Baby plants can be split up into their own pots. As the single plant gets bigger, move it up to progressively larger pots, ending up in four-inch pots for adults.

Hopefully this article inspires you to try your hand at propagating African violets. The best way to start is to go buy a nice looking one from a local garden center or even at your neighborhood grocery store florist department. These tend to be economical, but well cared for. A floral shop is also able to get some really nice, high quality plants if you desire. Many times, they will take requests for specific colors too. A word of caution, African violets are addicting. There is always another cool looking color or pattern to be had!

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.