

African Violets and Gesneriads

The African violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) is one of America's favorite houseplants. Under the right conditions, they are able to bloom almost continuously indoors. Baron Walter von St. Paul discovered these blooming beauties in West Africa in the late 18th century—hence the name 'saintpaulia'. Not a true violet, African violets are part of the gesneriad family which encompasses a large number of interesting 'cousins'.

Since their discovery, hybridizers have developed a wide range of leaf sizes and styles as well as many beautiful and varied flower forms and flower colors. No matter which flower color, leaf type, or growth habit selected, the care for all types of African violets is similar. While these are relatively easy to grow houseplants, they do require consistent care.

LIGHT

Window facing east or west is best

Avoid direct sunlight

Grow well under fluorescent plant lights (approx. 8" above plants, for 12 to 16 hours/day)

TEMPERATURE

Grow best at 65 to 75 degrees nighttime temp., with a 10-15 degree increase during day

Temperatures in excess of 80 degrees, growth and flowering will be slowed

HUMIDITY

High humidity is beneficial

Dish of damp gravel under plant increases humidity if home does not have a humidifier

Do NOT let bottom of pot sit in water

SOIL

Loose, well-drained potting soil high in peat moss

Commercial African violet soils are better than homemade blends

Soil mixture should be slightly acidic

POTTING

Containers need drain holes

Clay or plastic is grower's choice

When planting, firm the soil carefully and allow ¼" for top watering

WATERING

Amount and frequency of water will vary with soil mixture, size of container, drainage and environmental conditions

Goal is to maintain even moisture

Must keep water off leaves and the crown

Use room temperature water

If top watering, water until water flows through drain holes

If bottom watering, allow pot to sit in saucer of water until surface of soil feels moist, then pour off excess water

Or continuous watering using a wicking system (must have good light)

FERTILIZER

Regular fertilization is necessary to support year round bloom

Use lower strength, excessive fertilizer leads to vigorous growth and fewer blooms

Periodically flush soil with clear water to rinse out salt deposits

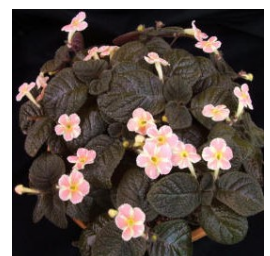
INSECTS AND DISEASES

Mealybugs—control with soapy water baths or by using cotton swag dipped in alcohol

Mites—highly contagious (isolate); causes distortion to new growth, flower buds, and stems; control with miticide or a soapy water spray

Powdery mildew—a white powder that forms on top of leaves; remove infected leaves; reduce crowding and increase air circulation

Crown rot—usually fatal infection due to overwatering; prevent by allowing surface of soil to dry out between waterings



Pictured from top to bottom: Chirita, African Violets, Columnea (Goldfish Plant), Episcia (Chocolate Soldier), Nematanthus (Guppy Plant), Episcia (Flame violet).