

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED SIDEWALK SALE

JANUARY 21 TO 24

Green 'n' Growing

Violets popular plants

By ELAINE GORDON
African Violets are the most popular of the flowering houseplants and chances are many were received as holiday gifts.

Likely, too, there are violet lovers wondering about vanishing flowers. The following should help solve the "who dunnit" because it isn't difficult to encourage "shrinking violets" to sing out with blooms. Just become better acquainted.

Provide as much light as possible without toasting the foliage and give the pots a quarter-turn periodically to promote symmetry in appearance. Or grow under fluorescent plant lights for 12 hours daily.

If leaves curl around the pot, the light is probably too intense; if the leaves are long and leggy, more light is needed; and if leaves grow out horizontally, the light is just right. Avoid drafts and heat sources.

Although happy with temperatures we're content in, some humidity is important. Set pots on a moist, pebble-filled tray (the evaporation moistens the air around them); or group together allowing space for elbow room (the moisture they give off raises the humidity level for all of them); or grow in a well-lit kitchen or bathroom (where air moisture is generally higher); or hide small containers of water beside them.

Feed monthly with a balanced fertilizer, but apply only at recommended intervals and strength as indicated on labels. Excessive feeding won't induce blooms to appear faster and can cause injury.

Keep the soil evenly damp, never wet. Overwatering encourages root rot while underwatering can cause wilting or foliage and buds to dry up. Cold water can suppress blooms and spot foliage.

Apply room temperature water (allow to stand overnight so most of the chlorine evaporates) when soil feels dry to the touch. I avoid water from a water softener.

If bottom watering only is given, top watering should be done periodically. A long, thin-spouted watering can will do the trick in directing moisture away from the crown and leaves.

They like "cramped feet" and bloom better when roots are somewhat restricted. When upgrading does become necessary, choose a plastic, squat pot with drainage holes, in a size that just accommodates the root system.

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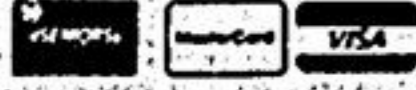
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