

CULTURE

This is a quick and easy lesson in giving African violets proper growing conditions. Following these general rules for culture should assure success.

1. Humidity: 40-70%; 50-60% is best.
2. Temperature: Day-21-27 Celsius.; 70-80 Fahrenheit Night - 16-21 Celsius; 60-70 Fahrenheit.
3. Light: Best under fluorescents; good results in natural light, but no direct sun.
4. Soil: Porous soil is recommended; soilless or nearly soilless mixes are best.
5. Water: Room temperature tap water allowed to stand 24 hours is satisfactory in most locations.
Water from the bottom by pouring water in the saucer.
6. Fertilizing: Light fertilizing at each watering is best.
7. Pots: Plain, round plastic pots are best.
8. Tools: Suit yourself; there are no "rules".

9. Cleanliness: The plant area, pots, tools, etc. must be clean to prevent disease.

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.

TEMPERATURE

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

LIGHT

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 lights. The tops of standard plants should be 30 cm. (12 in.) from the tubes. In the case of miniature and semiminature plants that distance should be reduced to 25 cm. (10 in.). The lights should be on about 12-14 hours per day. Fluorescent 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.

SOIL

African violets prefer a porous soil. The best results are not achieved by using commercially available potting soils based on heavy loams even though the label may say they are specifically formulated for African violets. Based on years of growing for pleasure, for show or commercially, African violet enthusiasts universally endorse light, porous, soilless or nearly soilless mixes. Many formulae for these mixes have been developed. A formula popular with many Canadian growers is the Fisher formula developed by Torontonians Ernie Fisher. It is not presently available commercially, but many enthusiasts mix vast quantities for their own or fellow growers' use. Many of the plants you see in our shows are growing in it. It is also good for growing the African violet's gesneriad relatives and many other houseplants.

WATER

Hard water and artificially softened water are not recommended as the chemicals they contain can damage the plants. Ordinary tap water in our area is satisfactory although it must be allowed to stand several hours, preferably twenty-four, to lose the chlorine that is dissolved in it. Some growers find that distilled water is better than tap water. Any water should be at room temperature when used.

There are many systems of automatic watering such as capillary matting or wicks for the busy grower. We will advise here only on basic watering-can watering for the small grower.

Plants should always be evenly moist. Water when the surface of the soil is just beginning to feel dry. Bottom watering is recommended. Fill the saucer of the plant and return half an hour later to dump out any water that has not been absorbed. Top watering by pouring water on the soil is not recommended. It causes the soil to become compacted, cramping the roots and cutting off their access to oxygen which they need. This has a detrimental effect on growth and the plant's root system.

FERTILIZING

African violets prefer a steady availability of fertilizer in small amounts. They like fertilizers ranging from one that has a balanced N-P-K (nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium) ratio such as 20-20-20 to one that is somewhat higher in phosphorus such as 12-36-14 or 15-30-15. The latter two formulae are designed to produce more and larger bloom especially as showtime approaches. 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). This regimen is called "constant feed".

POTS

Plain, round plastic pots are recommended. Clay pots appeal to the traditional and sentimental but soil in these pots dries rapidly and the watering regimen which is designed to assure even moisture is defeated. The bottom of the pot should be covered with a bit of plastic screening to prevent soil from leaking out. For standard size plants a pot diameter that is one-third the diameter of the plant is recommended. You can re-pot as the plant grows. Miniatures and semiminiatures are usually grown in 65 mm (2 ½ in.) pots.

TOOLS

Tools for working with need be nothing fancy. Small scoops, spoons, used dental picks, nut picks, small knives and so forth seem to find their way into the plant room and become the tools.

CLEANLINESS

We emphasized it in connection with disease prevention and we emphasize it again: the plant area must be kept clean! Pots must be washed, scrubbed and sterilized before re-use and tools should receive the same treatment after every use. Plants should be tended frequently and dead or dying foliage and blossoms removed promptly. They can harbour insect eggs and the spores of disease.

Good luck from us! We know that if you follow the above general guidelines you will achieve excellent results.

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