African Violets

Because African violets are adaptable to most every kind of environment, they have become one of the most popular houseplants to grow. There are nine factors that together will produce a beautiful African violet. They are: proper soilless growing media, water and watering methods, fertilizer, light, temperature, air circulation and spacing, humidity, potting and pest management.

- **Soilless potting mix**: The potting mix not only supports the plant but also supplies it with the necessary moisture and nutrients. It should be slightly acid and allow for root development and air and water circulation. There are special violet potting mixes available commercially. These potting mixes have been sterilized to prevent disease and insects.

- **Water and watering methods**: Any good drinking water is suitable. The preferred method is to thoroughly water over the top of the soil, allowing the water to run through the pot and drain off. Plants can be watered from the bottom with room-temperature water by placing the pot in water and allowing the plant to absorb the water (not more than 30 minutes). Violets should be watered only when the soil is dry to the touch. To reduce the possibility of any harmful salt build-up, the soil should be flushed thoroughly with clear tepid water every month or six weeks. Avoid getting water on the leaves.

- **Fertilizer**: Use a good well-balanced fertilizer that contains nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. Use as recommended on the label. If a plant has become dry and wilted, it should never be fertilized. It must first be watered with clear water at intervals with small applications until it has become stable. Then fertilizer may be applied.

- **Light**: Without good light, African violets will not bloom. When leaves are small and the leaf stems elongated, it is a good indication that the plant is not getting enough light. Adequate light is usually available in the East or South windows. Hot noonday sunlight in the summer is detrimental because of the heat that is generated through the window. Violets thrive in moderate to bright, indirect, indoor light. To prevent crooked stems, rotate the plant ¼ turn every day.

- **Temperature**: The ideal temperature for African violets is between 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit (F). A temperature below 50 degrees F can be fatal.

- **Air circulation and spacing**: In addition to fertilizer, violets also require carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, which are found in water and also in the air. Good air circulation is very important since stale, stagnant air can cause mildew to form on the leaves and blossoms of the plant. Allowing adequate space between plants on a bench or table permits good air circulation and reduces the chance of a transfer of diseases or insects from one plant to another.

- **Humidity**: Ideal humidity is from 40 to 50 percent. Misting with a fine spray will help raise the humidity but should always be done with warm water and never in bright sunlight.

- **Potting**: When potting African violets remember that they grow and bloom better in small pots. A plant in a 2-inch pot can be re-potted to a 3-inch pot. It should remain in this pot until the plant measures at least 9 inches in diameter. Then it can be transplanted into a 4-inch pot. Pots can be either plastic or clay. To start new plants, remove a fresh leaf from the plant, cut the leaf stem off about 1 inch from the leaf. Place cutting in a small container of vermiculite and perlite and place near the light. Keep moist at all times. When the cutting becomes rooted, watering with a weak fertilizer solution will promote faster development of new plantlets.

- **Pest management**: There are some disease organisms and insects that will attack African violets. Prevention is the best method for dealing with them. Observe good sanitation practices and it is unlikely you will need to spray. Since pests and diseases can be brought into the house on hands and clothing from the garden and on new plants, clean hands, clean clothing and clean tools is a good practice to follow. Isolate new plants brought into the house from your violets for two months. If a plant looks diseased, it is best to throw it away.

*The University of Maryland is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Equal Access Program.*

[http://extension.umd.edu/montgomery-county/home-gardening/urban-gardening](http://extension.umd.edu/montgomery-county/home-gardening/urban-gardening)