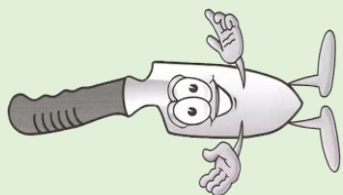


Trowel Talk!

January, 2017



- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 7, Number 1
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Editor: M.A. VanBerlo
- mgottawaeditor@gmail.com

African plant is no shrinking violet

Who hasn't admired an African violet in bloom? They were once thought to be fussy and difficult, but you really don't need the greenest of thumbs to be successful with these dainty and floriferous plants.

Since it was discovered late in the 19th century in Tanzania, the African violet (*Saintpaulia*) has become one of the most popular houseplants. They don't take up much room, don't need direct sun and they are ever-blooming – what's not to love?

Most African violets have a low-growing rosette of thick velvety leaves and bear sprays of 5-petalled blossoms in white, yellow and every shade and tint of blue, purple and red. Extensive hybridization has given us cultivars with bi-coloured or double flowers, frilly petals and variegated foliage.



Photo: Kelly Noel

African violets in shades of purple

They are classified in several ways including type of flower and leaf shape. One important classification is size, from micro-miniature to large, based on the diameter of the leaf rosette. African violets flower best when at least slightly pot-bound and it is a common mistake to put them in pots too large. Choose one with diameter one-third to one-half that of the plant – the lowest leaves should extend well beyond the rim.

The amount of light they receive is key to keeping them blooming. Don't put them in sun - they need bright but indirect light and do well under fluorescent light. Make sure to give them as much as 14 hours of light every day. They will tilt toward the light source so turn them at each watering to keep them balanced. They dislike

sudden fluctuations in temperature and can be damaged by temperatures below 15°C, so avoid drafty spots.

Keep the soil moist but not soggy. Use tepid water and avoid getting the leaves wet since they rot easily when damp. Don't leave excess water sitting in the saucer. Every month, feed with a liquid fertilizer that is balanced or has a high middle number (or do it every week at quarter strength).

In favourable conditions, they will flower almost continuously, new sprays of blossoms appearing as the old ones fade. Pinch off spent flowers and the oldest, lowest leaves as they wither. When you see a stretch of bare stem under the leaves, it's time to repot. Lift the rootball and slice away the bottom so it will sit deep enough in the pot to cover this "neck" with fresh soilless mix. This is one of the few plants that is planted deeper with each repotting.

Aphids, spider mites and mealy bugs can attack African violets. If this happens, treat with insecticidal soap, following the instructions on the bottle.

Your plant may develop an offshoot or second crown. Carefully remove it with some roots and pot it up. Trade this clone of your plant with a friend - a great way to increase the number of plants you have to display!



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

A variegated flower African violet

Not hooked yet? The African Violet Society of Canada [website](#) has growing information and galleries of pictures. The Ottawa African Violet Society has monthly meetings and a show each year, usually in May. Check their [website](#) for details.

Kelly Noel
Master Gardener

January TO DO List

- Start planning! Garden catalogues are available in print and online. Try something new this year.
- Continue to keep an eye on houseplants for pests and diseases. Reduce watering and fertilizer as their growth slows due to the shorter periods of light.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Geraniums can be grown from seed with relative ease, but take a long time to reach bloom size – usually 12-16 weeks. That means you need to start now to have mature plants this spring.

Use a seed tray with individual cells for each seed. The 5cm x 5cm cells let your seedlings get well established before needing repotting. Place soilless, seed-starter mix into the cell, leaving the top 1cm clear of soil. Wet the soilless mix thoroughly before seeding.



Geraniums come in a variety of colours and types – check the seed package to determine germination time and number of days until bloom.

Geraniums have a high germination rate, so plant one to two seeds per cell. You can always thin out or transplant extras.

Cover the seeds with a very fine layer of soilless mix or sand, to a depth no more than the size of the seed. I like to use sand because its texture and colour against the soilless mix allow me to see the depth of application clearly.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily

- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

CLINICS:

No clinics until spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Dividing and Maintaining Perennials – January 19 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

CityView United Church, 6 Epworth Ave., Nepean

Hosted by Nepean Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$4)

Flowering Bulbs for All Seasons – January 23 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

St Mary Magdalene Anglican Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea

Hosted by Gatineau Valley Gardeners (Guest fee: \$5)

Edible Gardening – February 11 – 2:30 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Almonte Civitan Hall, 500 Almonte Street, Almonte

Hosted by Almonte Seedy Saturday 9:00 am – 4:00 pm (No Guest fee)

Colour your Garden World with Perennials – February 13 – 7:00 pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre – the Fire Hall, 260 Sunnyside, Ottawa

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (Guest fee: \$7)

Garden Makeovers – Rejuvenating your garden – February 23 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Community Hall, 380 Springfield Road, Ottawa

Hosted by Rockcliffe Park Garden Club (Guest fee: \$7)



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>



Use a spray bottle to lightly mist the seeded trays. This ensures the seed has good contact with the soil, but won't wash the seed into any deeper crevices.

Cover the tray with clear plastic to keep the moisture level consistent. A dry cleaner bag works well or you can buy tray systems that have covers for this purpose. Place the covered tray in a warm well-lit spot – under grow lights is best.

Check the seed trays daily – watch for signs of too much moisture or too little. Vent the tray to allow moisture to escape or mist the trays to correct the moisture level. The seeds should germinate in 5-7 days (but can take longer). As they germinate, remove the covering – it's best to do this gradually over a few days to 'harden off' the seedlings. Start fertilizing once they have their first set of true leaves.