



Officers of the Lebanon Flower Club, from left, are Norma Pantelich, secretary; Susan Iezz, second vice president; Alma Schmalzer, vice president; Ruth Reist, president; and Lélla Crum, treasurer.



Members of the Lebanon Flower club examine the rainbow hues of African Violets raised by Melody Hartman.

Expert Tells How To Raise Prize-Winning Violets

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — Snow covers the ground, but flowers are blooming at Melody Hartman's home in Columbia.

Melody grows hundreds of African Violets, which she exhibits in places as far away as New England. The shop in her home is called Violet Rainbow II.

Recently, Melody shared her secrets on raising prize-winning African Violets with members of the Lebanon Flower Club.

"Anyone can grow African Violets," Melody said. The secret is bright light.

Although Melody grows her flowers under fluorescent lights, she said that any window with a strong bright light is a good place for violets. She recommends windows that face the East.

"The more light, the more blooms," she said. But she cautioned that too much light may also cause sunburn.

Melody keeps the lights on her violets for 12 to 14 hours daily. The light fixtures are only 8 to 10 inches from the top of the plants.

African violets are available in many varieties and sizes in standard and trailing shapes. Although African violets are mostly thought of as coming in shades of purple, the blooms come in many different colors with the latest release in yellow. Leaves also vary in colors of green, white, pink, or magenta.

Variegated leaves need more light than other kinds of violets.

Care for violets

- Water only when the top of the soil feels dry to touch, about once a

week. Even if a violet sets several months without water, it will perk up if watered.

- Use room temperature or lukewarm water. You can water from the top or the bottom of the plant, but do not get water on the center leaves.

- If you accidentally spill water on the center leaves, blot dry the leaves will decay or rot.

- If you water from the bottom, dump off excess water as violets don't like wet feet.

- If leaves become dusty, wash them with warm water, but let the leaves dry before putting the plant back in the light.

Melody said that she avoids using African violet potting soil that is sold in grocery stores. "Roots like to breathe," she said. She uses a one-to-one ratio of peat moss and perlite.

"Violets prefer lightly compact soil so do not press the ground firmly or the roots will not have room to breathe," she said.

Starting new plants

Suckers, which grow aside the plant can be used to start new plants. The suckers should have a single crown. To start, cut into the soil to keep the sucker intact. Pot the sucker, water, and place in light.

Another method to start new violets is to take a leaf from a mature plant. Pick a leaf from the middle of the mature plant as the leaf should not be too old or too young. Leave about a one-inch stem, and cut at an angle. Start the leaf in soil and water lightly. In 8 to 10 weeks, little starts come out of

the ground surrounding the leaf.

When there are three to 15 leaves, pull root ball out of pot, remove parent leaf and tear plant apart. Leave a little root on each leaf, and you can pot each one. The plants will bloom about three months later.

The pot size should be about one third of the leaf span of the plant. It is good to keep the plants pot bound.

Label starts so you know what variety of violet is in the pot.

Occasionally, violets get necks. To rejuvenate the plant, put it out of the pot. Cut it apart at the root ball, sink back into pot and fill with soil around the neck. The neck will root and rejuvenate.

Tips for growing show violets

- Grow under fluorescent lights as more control is possible.

- Select variety that is good for show.

- Disbud. Let bloom once to make sure it is blooming a true color then disbud so that beautiful big leaves develop.

- Eight to ten weeks before show, remove buds, blossoms, and suckers.

- Temperatures can affect time of budding. If the blooms are coming too early, lower the temperatures. Raise the temperatures to encourage earlier blooming.

- Before show, remove spent blossoms, stubs, and clean leaves.

The National Violet Convention will be held April 19-24 at the Lancaster Host Farm, Lincoln Highway. More details will be published.

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