

Are You A Violet Expert? Take the Quiz!

- I water my African violets....
 - When I think of it or when the plants seem really dry.
 - Once or twice a week, on the same day(s) each week.
 - Constantly, using a self-watering system designed for violets.
 - Water?
- When I water....
 - I let the violets stand in water for however long it takes to soak up the water.
 - I water a little bit into the top of the pot, but never enough to run out the bottom.
 - I use a self-watering system and occasionally water from the top to leach the soil.
 - I water thoroughly either from the top or bottom and empty the saucer soon after.
- The following best describes the light my violets get:
 - Fluorescent T12 light 12 inches above the foliage for twelve hours a day (or T8 12 inches above for 8 hours)
 - Bright window light with plants sitting nearby.
 - Some light from windows with plants sitting toward the middle of the room.
 - Ceiling light units turned on for most of the day but no windows.
- The following best describes my fertilizing habits:
 - Once or twice a year, if I think of it.
 - Once a month, following package directions.
 - Once a week or constantly (if using self-watering system) at a slightly weaker-than-recommended rate.
 - Once a week using a little more than recommended.
- The following best describes the soil in which my violets are growing:
 - Good firm garden dirt.
 - Potting mix that is fairly dense and packs down well.
 - Very loose porous potting mix that is not packed down at all.
 - The soil mix that my violets came in when I got them.
- The temperature in my growing space is...
 - Usually around 72° F during the day and a little cooler at night.
 - Variable, sometimes over 80° during the day and much cooler at night.
 - Usually below 70° all the time.
 - Usually warmer than 80° all the time.
- My violets are growing in pots that are...
 - Made of plastic or non-porous materials.
 - Made of clay.
 - Both types
- Measure your violet's leaf span (the diameter across the leaves), then measure the diameter of the pot in which it is growing. The ratio of the leaf span to the pot is:
 - 1 to 2 (the plant is half the diameter of the pot)
 - 1 to 1 (the plant is the same size as the pot)
 - 2 to 1 (the plant is twice the size of the pot)
 - 3 to 1 (the plant is three times the size of the pot)
- I repot my violets...
 - I don't.
 - At least once every year.
 - Whenever I see a neck developing underneath the leaves.
 - Whenever they start to look sick.
- If I saw a side-shoot forming between the leaves of my violet, I would...
 - Poke it out immediately.
 - Remove it carefully when it was big enough to be planted in its own pot.
 - Let it grow.

Answers (Add your points)

1. A= 0 points, B=1 point, C=2 points, and D=subtract 1 point.
This question is about how often to water. Constant self-watering is the ideal way to provide consistent moisture to violets and to maximize blooming and growing. Once-week-water will still result in nice plants, but this method is vulnerable to changes in your schedule as well as abnormally low or high humidity (which will change how much water your violet demand.) Watering only when plants appear dry, or when you think about it, will result in small, tired-looking leaves and few flowers. Forget to water entirely and your hobby is at risk.
2. A= subtract 1 point, B= 0 points, C=2 points, and D=1 point
Although this question also addresses watering, the issue here is how much. Again, the self-watering method wins out. It provides enough water (unlike choice B) without the risks of root rot (providing the proper porous potting mix is used) that choice A has. Notice the addition to self-watering however! Once in a while, an excellent grower will water violets from the top of the pot so that the water runs through leaching out fertilizer salts that inevitably accumulate. If you self-water, but don't leach, subtract one point. Choice D is a very satisfactory watering method; particularly when water is occasionally add at the top of the pot.
3. A=2 points, B=1 point, C=0 points, D=1 point.
Violets require fairly bright light in order to produce flowers and a flat leaf pattern. Ideally, they should be grown under fluorescent (or other new artificial light methods) as described in A. The length of day and the distance from the leaves may vary somewhat from grower to grower, depending on other factors like reflecting surfaces or natural light availability.) Subtract one point if these light are left on day and night, 24 hours. Since artificial light isn't always a possible choice, growing your plants in a location very close to a bright window, but out of hotor intense direct sunlight, is a good substitute. Give yourself a bonus of one point if you turn your plants at least once a week to even out the amount of light to all sides. In many office situations, the option of placing violets nearer a ceiling light fixture that is lit for 12 hours a day works well. Are your violets sitting far away from adequate light? You may notice that the leaves seem to be growing upward, that your plant is leaning toward the light, and/or that your violets don't bloom well.
4. A=0 points, B=1 point, C=2 points, D=0 points
It may surprise you to find that it is wise to use a conservative approach to fertilizing. A regular and frequent diet of weak fertilizer will produce better results for most growers than the other methods, especially if it is added to the constant-water reservoir. Too much fertilizer can result in a build-up of salts in the soil which causes leaves to burn. It is actually more dangerous to overuse fertilizer than to forget it entirely! On the other hand, violet do need their nutrients, and proper fertilizing will improve blooming and growing patterns.
5. A=subtract 1 point, B=0 points, C=2 points, D=0 points
Neither garden dirt, nor the average potting mix that is available in stores will provide your violet roots with the amount of air and space that they need for optimum growth. Only a very loose mix that is not pack down (at all!) will allow those fine fibrous roots to thrive! Often, the soil that your violet came in will also be too heavy because greenhouses tend to use one mix for all types of tropical plants. Try this test: poke your finger into the soil in which your violet is potted and push it all the way to the bottom of the pot. If this is impossible or very difficult, the soil is too heavy and needs to have a "soil lightener" added such as perlite or vermiculite. This airy mix is also required to be successful with constant-water methods of growing.
6. A=2 points, B=subtract 1 point, C=0points, and D=0 points
Temperature is surprisingly important in determining the overall health of violets. Temperatures which are in the mid or low 70s are ideal. The more consistent the temperature, the more consistent the growth of the leaves will be. But when temperature is consistently too warm, the leaves will often grow with invariably long stems resulting in a lanky open look. When the temperature is regularly too cool, the leaves commonly grow with stems that are too short resulting in a growth pattern that is so tight that blossom stems can't get through. Too cool temperatures may cause flowers to be deeper in color and to last longer (not an awful problem), while warm temperatures will have the opposite effect of fading colors and shortening the life of flowers. Either of those is better than widely varying temperatures during the day. Aside from the resulting problems of uneven growth, these temperature differences allow fungus to thrive.
7. A=2 points, B=1 point, C=0 points
Non-porous pots (plastic is the least expensive) are really best for growing violets. Plastic pots work well with constant-water methods of growing, do not accumulate salts on the rim, are lightweight, and easy to clean. None of that is true for clay pots, which are also hard to find in the squatty smaller sizes that African violets prefer. Using a combination of different types of pots requires the grower to use different watering patterns, since clay pots dry out sooner and watering must be done more often. That is not easy to track, and eventually some plants are likely to be either over- or under-watered.

8. A=subtract 1 point, B=0 points, C=1 point, D=2 points
African violets like to be in small pots! Nature planted them on moss and in crevices on rocky cliffs with a compact root system, and they have never needed big spaces since then. Violet leaves should always cover the entire pot and extend beyond the edge. This allows the roots to fill the entire pot, maximizing their use of available water, and providing a gentle threat to survival that triggers the reproductive cycle of blooming.
9. A=subtract 1 point, B=2 points, C=2 points, D=0 points
It is important to repot violets frequently—not into a bigger pot but into fresh potting mix which buries any exposed neck. Regular repotting is not as stressful as desperation repotting (when your violet is no longer thriving.) In fact, violets that are repotted yearly may live for forty or fifty years! You may use either the calendar (once a year) or your eyes (see a neck and repot that violet) as a successful guide. Subtract two points if you forget to look.
10. A=2 points, B=2 points, C=0 points
Side-shoots on violets are called “suckers.” Growers have a choice of eliminating them immediately or using them for propagation purposes sometime later. Suckers with four to six leaves should be removed. Some growers prefer to poke them out when they have just three or four leaves, but do be careful that it really is a sucker and not a flower stem! Allowing suckers to grow to full-sized crowns will put them in competition with the original plant. Eventually it will have a bushy form, and often flowers are reduced in size or number. It won’t kill the plant to leave it, but good growers know better.

Scoring:

15-20 points – You are a top-notch grower and an African violet expert!

10-15 points – You do quite well with violets and can be trusted to help your friends with their violets too.

5-10 points – Your violets are probably just getting by. Try a few of these tips before you give advice to others.

5 points or less – You probably shouldn’t be giving anyone else advice on African violets! But, there are no lost causes and no brown thumbs, only those who haven’t yet learned the unique needs for growing this plant. It’s time to seek out more information at the African Violet Society of America www.avsa.org so that you can truly enjoy this wonderful hobby!