

Beginner's Forum

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Keep It Simple

Violets, if you haven't noticed, can involve work to an alarming extent – hunting for them – driving about for them, planting, fertilizing, and grooming them. We may start off in this marvelous hobby as a pleasant way to spend a few leisure hours – only to find it can become quite intrusive, taking up more space than we initially intended (I'm writing this on the balcony) and certainly a fairly high commitment of time.

As a group, I think we're all prone to start too many leaves gleaned from plant sales tables, violet friends, or those delightfully described "special offers" in mail-order lists. We watch them develop into mature plants, and, pleased with our accomplishments – may lose sight of the fact we've now created the need for substantial growing space.

To avoid the many perils associated with overcrowding plants, let's consider the benefits of organizing your growing. Have you heard of the "KISS" principle? – "Keep It Simple Stupid". Believe me, when I say it's a motto worthy of consideration here.

First then, apply your thoughts to how much space is to be allotted – and where, recognizing that you require good light – preferably fluorescent lighting, good air circulation and a fairly consistent temperature range of 65 – 80 degrees. A basement growing area is fine if the temperature requirement can be met, as is any room with a window to allow air circulation or air conditioning. Those fortunate enough to have central air conditioning have it made.

Plant Stands – may be wood or metal, stationary or moveable, and I've seen some ingenious methods used to provide ample growing space. I like the commercially available three-tray stands having a two-tube 4 ft. fluorescent fixture to provide light for each tray. These have the added feature of being on casters for ease of movement.

Basic research – It is of course necessary to observe what good growers do, and to read all available material in the hope you will learn from the experts. The problem comes when you keep every book and folder in case some day you may wish to refer to an item. You don't of course, because you've kept no list of which subjects are covered where. If you do get a good tip regarding another grower's formula for success, write it down. Never trust good information to memory. If you are at all like me (I must have the attention span of a 5-year old) .5 teaspoon very conceivably could become 5 teaspoons.

Fertilizers – we probably get ripped off more times buying fertilizers and other magic potions which stand on a shelf until they dry up, but there seems to be no real cure for our basic compulsion to try other growers recommended "formulas for success". I would caution growers of the folly in jumping too quickly to new methods. A delicate snobbery may prevail in some clubs about growing methods, but the fact remains that violets will do well for anyone willing to give them a fairly consistent regimen of care.

Try new methods on your plants and analyze the results continuously as they grow. Culture changes in mature plants are just too noticeable. You may learn also that some things designed to reduce time required in one aspect of plant care may add extra time in another – clean up, etc., and this is no bargain.

Soil Mixes – When you buy something ready mixed and pre-packaged you are of course paying for labor, but it can be a good buy if you like the product. If you are prepared to do the work, have space for storing ingredients and mixing your own – then it may seem silly to pay extra. Think of the best place for mixing and storage – keeping in mind that soil makes a mess, and unless you are singularly unobservant where dust is concerned, it best be mixed in a garage or outside. You may then bring in to your growing area only what is needed.

Violet purchases – Violet growers are usually impulse-prone and face the hazard of buying the same thing twice – or more. Make a resolve to list your needs and check off as you go along. This applies especially at shows or conventions where you just can't resist the sales tables. Resolve to buy no more than a certain number of new introductions. When that doesn't work, you should remind yourself that there are other areas in which you are frugal – and decide later what they are! It's more important to keep names on your plants – we have respect bordering on awe for those people who can and do remember the names of all of their plants, but it is nice to know you are not alone in requiring a stake or tape to keep tabs of yours.

Pots, saucers and gadgets – Unfortunately, pots come in a great number of shapes and sizes, but for our needs we can narrow it down to a few which we can stack neatly – 2 ¼", 3" squatty, 5" squatty and a few 6" bulb pans. Saucers can be 4", 6" and 8". You can of course buy enough frozen pies and somehow dispose of the contents so you have "free" aluminum pie plates. This is as good a place as any to digress into the problem aspects of other containers. We all eventually purchase assorted items to protect miniature sinningia or to use as terrarium bowls – but bear in mind that collecting dozens of brandy and beer glasses is really quite unnecessary unless of course you occasionally throw a bang-up party for your violet friends. Unusual containers, i.e., egg cups, old shoes, chamber pots – we've seen them all – also take too much precious storage space. Throw them out after the show or take them to the white elephant table at the next church bazaar. Otherwise, shelves can become so cluttered that finding anything is just too much trouble, especially if your shelves are high.

Pests, diseases, etc. – It's easy to be carried away here. We live in a scientific age with a marvel a minute, and all kinds of problem-solving solutions. Before you stock up on these wondrous products, however, make sure you have a problem. I used to think that advertisers must be inventing problems and diseases, but in time you will likely experience a few. An eagle-eyed exploratory viewing of your plants will tell you when all is not well. Don't panic – learn to recognize symptoms and utilize the appropriate remedy. Perhaps the simplest remedy may be to toss a plant or two out of your collection. I don't hesitate to do that rather than risk the spread of a problem.

Watering – Be it by mat, wick or individual watering, always start at the same place and work in a pattern thus ensuring you water evenly. The method I use consists of a large water container and a submersible pump with plastic hose and wand with which I place water in each saucer – no mats to launder – no spilled water.

Other Perils – You may find yourself on club committees, or asked to serve as an officer of the local AV club. Worse still, you may be asked to bring refreshments (devastating for me). There's also the off

chance you'll be asked to speak about your hobby – no fear – as long as it's a little bit interesting, people will listen.

I could go on and on but I'm sure you get the idea – enjoy your plants but don't let them take over your life completely – remember to “Keep It Simple ...”

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