

Location, Location, Location!

By Paul F. Kroll

The title of this article may make you think that I am talking about real estate; not so! I am, of course, referring to plants and their position(s) on your plant shelves. I will not be talking about window growing, as I do not do much of that at all. We have no window sills, with the exception of a bay window in the kitchen which faces west. I grow a few other house plants in that location.

Most African violets grow well with a minimum of thought regarding their shelf location. The grower needs to pay attention to the height of the lights in relation to the plants underneath. Standards, miniatures and semi-miniatures, rooting leaves, etc., each require certain light levels. The light stands themselves sometimes dictate what will grow well on each shelf. I have two stands that are four tier and the shelves are not adjustable, although there is a small amount of adjustment that can be made to the hanging fixture. Next, the light source needs to be taken into account, whether a two-tube, four-tube, and what type: T-12, T-8, etc. As my fixtures "retire" for one reason or another, I have been replacing them with new T-8s, and I like them. So do the plants! These light choices (in *Chatter*) have been written up several times now, so I will not dwell on this subject, but refer you to articles written by others who have already discussed the topic.

Gesneriads are a bit more specific about their placement on the light stands. Keeping in mind that the light source alternatives mentioned above come into play here, I will mention some specifics that might help you to find that "just right location" for your gesneriad plants which are not presently growing to suit your taste.

I grow all my tuberous and rhizomatous gesneriads under four T-12 tubes. They require the most light of any plants I grow and the four tube fixtures seem to take good care of providing that for them. *Sinningia*, *Nautilocalyx*, and the intergeneric am. AWS.

xSinvana 'Mount Magazine', *Kohleria* hybrids and species, *Columnnea* hybrids and

species, *Also bia* and *Nematanthus* all do well under the four tube fixtures. The vining types of *Aeschynanthus* do well under these conditions also. Some specific plants do best at the middle or end, but that will be up to you. If you watch them, they will tell you! The other gesneriads I grow do just fine under two tubes: The upright forms of *Aeschynanthus* (*A. humilis*, etc.), *Streptocarpus*, *Petrocosmea*, *Gesneria*, *Para-drymonia* and *Chirita* all do well under two tubes. I remember asking Peter Shalit, hybridizer of *Chirita*, etc., about where to grow *Chirita sclerophylla*.

He responded that, "This plant is like a cat. Cats have specific places that they enjoy. *C. sclerophylla* is like that. Find a place it likes and do not move it from that location."

This type of advice is key to specific plants. You must ask different growers how they grow certain plants. I do that all the time, when I see a particularly well-grown specimen.

Most of my *Episcia* plants are grown under two tubes as well. *Episcias* are well known for preferring warm conditions, and we grow them on the top shelves where the temperatures are a bit warmer than on the lower shelves where I grow *Petrocosmea*, for instance. One exception to this rule was given to me by Jill Fischer who is a marvelous grower of all *Episcias*, but specifically in the pink and white foliage colors. I asked Jill for some *Episcia* cuttings, which she eagerly provided. She admonished me to "grow *Episcia* 'Ember Lace' on the bottom shelf where it can be cooler." I have done this, and for the very first time ever - I have a well grown specimen of this rather difficult hybrid.

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