

Best AVM Articles for 2001

Mary Stallings – Ten Basic Principles in Growing Show Plants

(Nov-Dec, 2000)

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Below I have outlined some ways to help you in developing your show plants. Do not hesitate to enter your violets in the show. Your participation is a responsibility to your club as it upgrades the show's score. Remember some plants will win blue ribbons, some red, some white; all cannot be blue ribbon winners. The important thing is to have a pretty, healthy plant you are proud of that will add a touch of beauty to the show.

I. Choice of a show plant

1. Choose a good variety that you like and will enjoy.
2. Try to choose a plant for each section of the show schedule.
3. Important qualities of a show plants:
 - a. Stay away from unnamed varieties. Be sure some are registered.
 - b. Plants with tailored leaves are the easiest to grow into a nice flat rosette, but ruffled foliage can be spectacular.
 - c. Double blossoms last longer.
 - d. Many new varieties of single blossoms are no longer free dropping.
 - e. Prolific bloomers are desired. The number of blossoms per peduncle should be nine or more for standard varieties.
 - f. Be sure the plant has a good center and is insect free.
 - g. The petioles should be strong enough to support the leaves.
 - h. A mature plant should have a good leaf pattern with each layer of leaves overlapping the petioles below without spaces between the leaves. No soil should be visible.
 - i. The beauty of new frills and blossoms, also variegated foliage are eye-catching.
 - j. The peduncle should be strong enough to hold the blossoms upright.
 - k. The leaves should grow out straight from the stem of the plant.

II. Care of the Young Plant

1. Small plantlets with root ball of 1-2 inches are adequate to plant in 2 ¼ - 2 ½ inch pots.

2. Plant in center of pot.
3. Be sure the plant is level in the pot. Use opposite leaves as a guide. This is important to balance the ranks in a mature plant.
4. Allow that plants to bloom to determine if they are true.
5. Plastic pots should have holes burned in the sides to insure air circulation to the roots.
6. If wicking is used, the plant should be allowed to dry out about every 10 days to the point water is needed. Water with tepid water, then return to wicking. This allows the roots to get aiand also washes down the accumulated salts.
7. When the plant is root-bound, transfer to a “Moist-Rite”. The plant will be about 12” – 14” in diameter.

III. Space

1. Crowding plants results in the development of long, weak and twisted petioles.
2. Crowded plants provide ideal conditions for the development of foliage diseases.
3. Space is necessary to develop good symmetry.
4. Plants should not be allowed to touch each other. This prevents leaf damage.
5. Leaves should not be pinned down. The stems will grow straight from the stem if space and light are provided.
6. Leaf supports help in supporting and training the leaves.

IV. Lighting

1. A strong light must reach the crown of the plant to set buds.
2. Wide Spectrum/Gro-Lux Fluorescent lights should burn 12 hours a day.
3. Lights should be about 12 inches above the shelf.
4. Turn the plants 3-4 times a week. This helps to maintain a straight main stem.
5. Too much light will cause bleaching of the leaf color.

V. Humidity

1. Humidity of 50-60 percent is ideal.

2. Promotes larger blossoms.
3. Growth rate is increased.
4. Low humidity may cause dropping of buds.
5. The level of humidity may be raised by placing plants on trays filled with moist pebbles, moistening foliage frequently or adding a room humidifier.
6. Too high humidity without good air circulation may produce rot or mold.

VI. Temperature and Ventilation

1. At 50 degrees, a plant will not grow.
2. 60 – 70 degrees is ideal.
3. High temperatures may cause blasting of buds, streaking of blossom color, yellowing of leaves and speeds up the activities of insects.
4. Ventilation provides circulation of air which is important in preventing the development of disease organisms. The leaf surface continuously loses water vapor and oxygen and allows the entrance of carbon dioxide. This is necessary in supplying food for growth.
5. Temperature below 60 degrees for a period of time may cause brittle foliage which curves down; also deformed blossoms.

VII. Watering

1. Use slightly warm (tepid) water to prevent shocking the feeder roots.
2. Use water direct from the faucet unless it goes through a water softener.
3. *Moist* is the word to describe the water content of the soil.
4. Growth problems result from both over-watering and under-watering.
5. Apply only tepid water to a plant that is dry; allow 24 hours for the plant to recover.
6. Learn the analysis of your water supply.

VIII. Soil

1. Use a loose, porous soil with good drainage. Most commercially prepared soils are excellent.
2. Be sure the soil is free from harmful diseases, insect eggs and weed seed. This may be accomplished by pasteurizing the soil (bake 30 minutes at 180 degrees) or by use of chemicals.

3. The pH of the soil should be 6.5 – 7. This is important as it controls the availability of food to the plant. Water, fertilizers and chemicals have a marked effect on pH when added to the soil. The pH should be checked about every three months as decomposing of soil elements alters the acidity.

4. Use slightly moist soil when potting.

IX. Fertilizers

1. The soil and the fertilizer should be compatible to be sure the plant receives proper nutrients.

2. Apply fertilizer only when the soil is damp.

3. Set up a regular program of feeding and do not increase the fertilizer before show time. This will result in tight, burned centers or an interrupted growth pattern.

4. One tablespoon of super-phosphate added to the watering jug about four months before the show will help increase the development of roots and blossoms. It will change the pH of the soils super-phosphate has a pH of 2. It will also increase the growth of algae in a “Moist-Rite”.

X. Cautions and Cleanliness

1. Isolate and spray all new plants before adding to your collection. (I remove all buds and blossoms.)

2. Use ¼ teaspoon Orthene to one quart of water; spray under the leaves and pour the solution on soil until it is saturated.

3. Keep the plants free of dust and soil. They interfere with plant growth and aid in the spread of disease. Wet soil particles may cause marred foliage.

4. Wash the leaves under slightly warm running water. Remove excess water with a sponge. Use mild soap solution to remove spray marks.

5. Observe your plants often. Look for insects or their signs; change in the blossoms; changes in leaf size, shape or color, and suckers.

6. Yellow leaves are usually the result of cultural problems or pests. Check pH of soil and root system.

7. Remove all spent blossoms and stems, aging leaves and suckers.

8. Add 3-4 drops of mild detergent in the misting water to help deter some insects.

9. Be careful in changing your cultural methods. Have a clear understanding of how and why it may improve your plants. Experiment on one or two plants.

10. Give your plants the essentials they need to be strong healthy plants that will be able to

resist disease and pest invasion.

11. Beware of cut flowers brought in from the garden.

12. Fungus gnats are vehicles which will spread insects and disease among your plants. Saturation of the soil with Orthene will eliminate them.

13. Beware of the advice you receive on growing violets. Be sure the individual has demonstrated the horticultural knowledge and perfection you are seeking.