

Wicking African Violets

Wicking is a great way to water violets. Before you wick you must be certain that you have the correct pot and potting mix, or you may end up with rotted plants that were too wet. You should use plastic pots to wick which slow the rate of evaporation from the soil. The potting mix must be very porous so that there is plenty of air around the roots even when the mix is wet. We recommend that you mix your own potting mix using a recipe like this: 1 part sphagnum peat moss, 1 part perlite, 1 part vermiculite. Many growers add a small amount of dolomite lime to control the pH. The potting mix should be pre-moistened before potting your violet, or the wicking process may not function properly. The wick that you use should be 6 to 8 inches long, and must be a man-made fiber such as acrylic, rayon, or nylon yarn or cording. The wick needs to be wet when it is used, and I find that soaking it in a little soapy water helps to break down the water resistance that some of the materials seem to have. You may add the wick when repotting by stringing it through the drainage hole in the pot and up over the top rim, then adding potting mix and the violet. Alternatively you may put the wick in after potting by using a hook (I use a hook made from stiff florist wire, but some prefer a crochet hook, and a long darning needle also works.) Simply push the straight end of the tool into a hole on the bottom of the pot, catch the wicking material in the hook, and pull on the tool at the top of the pot to bring it on through... do watch out so that leaves don't get punctured. The wick should dangle out the bottom of the pot and into a reservoir of water below (without the pot itself making contact with the water.) The reservoir may be as simple as a plastic food container that has a hole cut in the lid... simply fill the container with water, set the violet on top of the container with the wick dangling through the hole in the lid and into the water inside. For large collections you may wish to use a plastic tray filled with water and covered with egg crating (white plastic grid that is often used in fixtures to diffuse fluorescent light). If you cannot find good sturdy trays or egg crating locally, you can purchase them online from www.indoorgardensupplies.com which is a commercial member of the African Violet Society of America and has a long-time record of good service. Fertilizer should be added to the water in the reservoirs. Because the water will evaporate the mixture may become too concentrated over time. To avoid problems, measure the fertilizer at about half-strength (if the directions say to use 1/4 teaspoon per gallon per week, use 1/8 teaspoon.) Once you have your violets wicked, do not forget to keep looking at your plants on a regular basis. Sometimes it becomes so easy to water that pests or disease become established without your notice. Finally, you may begin to find greenish algae growing in the reservoir. Either wash the container every month or so, or you may wish to add a bit of Physan 20 (an algaecide) to the water.

Happy Growing! Joyce Stork