

# GROWING SHOW PLANTS THAT WIN

by Pat Hancock

## 1. All African violets do NOT make good show plants!

- a) Choose plants that grow flat and symmetrical
- b) Choose plants with leaves large enough that each row covers the space between the rows so that you cannot see soil between the rows when you look down at the plant.
- c) Choose plants whose leaves behave well and do not bend or twist away from their allotted space
- d) Choose plants that have five or more blooms on each pedicel. The more, the better!
- e) Choose plants that hold their blooms up well. Blooms that hide under the foliage do not show well.
- f) Choose plants that hold their blooms fresh for two weeks or longer.

## 2. Growing for show begins eight to twelve months before the show date and requires grooming the plant at least once each month and repotting every three or four months.

- a) Leaves grow from the crown of the plant in sets of THREE. As the plant matures, each set of leaves becomes larger and larger. It is imperative that as the leaves become larger, the smaller underlying leaves be removed. You cannot wait until the month before the show and then begin removing small leaves. It must be done each month or at the most, every six weeks.
- b) All bloom stems, even the tiniest ones, should be removed completely each time you groom the plant.
- c) Foliage should be kept as clean as possible and any water spots, soil, etc., should be cleaned off at once. You may use one part vinegar to ten parts water, or just plain water with a drop or two of dish liquid soap, then rinse. Spots that remain on the foliage for a time are much harder to remove.
- d) Any suckers or side shoots should be removed as soon as they appear as they will distort the shape of the plant if allowed to remain even for a short period.

## 3. Methods of Watering.

- a) Wick watering is the most common method of watering plants grown for show. With wick watering, plants are constantly fed, and there is a lesser chance of getting a row of leaves that is out of proportion to the rest of the leaves. With the constant feed, the plant will grow more consistently. Fertilizer during the growing period should be even numbers such as 20/20/20 or 15/16/17, etc. If you wish to use a bloom booster 2-1/2 to 3 months before the show, that is fine, but do not overdo fertilizers with a high middle number or you will lose the center of the plant eventually.



- b) Top watering is fine as long as you never let the plant get totally dry to the point where the foliage falls down around the pot. It is very hard to get foliage to lay flat after it has been allowed to droop. With this method, you must fertilize each week.

- c) Bottom watering is fine, but you must NEVER let the plant remain in the water for more than 30 minutes. You must also never let the plant get too dry for the same reason as with top watering. Also, with this method, you must fertilize each week consistently!

#### 4. How are Show Plants Judged?

- a) Judging is by the Merit system, which means that each plant is judged on its own merits. Plants in the Collection Classes must be point scored and any plant that is in the running for Best in Show must be point scored. Each plant begins with 100 points and points are deducted. Plants not in the Collection Classes are mentally scored in much the same way, but an actual number is not written down. To receive a blue ribbon, a plant must score a minimum of 90 points, 80 for a red ribbon, and 70 for a white ribbon.
- b) Gaps or spaces between leaves or rows of leaves, breaks in the symmetry of the leaf pattern, uneven distribution of foliage, over or under potting (the pot should be 1/3 the size of the plant), long neck, and plant not centered in the pot can count off up to 3 points for each instance.
- c) Points on plants may be deducted for many things. Smaller leaves under larger leaves is probably the way most people lose points on their plants. We see this problem at every show and it is so easily fixed. Hair, dust particles and water spots all count off up to 1 point. Marred leaves, broken leaves, dead leaves, yellowed leaves, suckers not completely removed, traces of spray – all of these may count off up to 1 point each. A variegated plant that is mostly green will have several points taken off, but a plant that shows no variegation will have 10 points deducted for that one thing.
- d) Plants with a sucker (four leaves and no bud showing) will be eliminated from consideration, so it is very important to remove suckers completely as soon as they are seen. This does not apply to trailers and Species plants that are to be grown as in the wild.

#### 5. The Foliage of The Plant Accounts for 50 of the 100 Points.

- a) Monthly grooming is an absolute MUST if you want a perfect plant.
- b) Leaves grow in sets of three and begin with a perfect triangle. The plant will remain a triangle until at least three rows are in and perhaps you will need four rows before the plant is round and symmetrical.
- c) Each month or so (depending on your temperature and fertilizer) you will need to remove the three outer leaves from the plant. They will be in a triangle and they will be the three that are lowest on the stem of the plant. If you look closely, they will be slightly smaller than the next row above them. If they are not removed, they will take strength away from the next set of three that are trying to grow larger. You will need to do this each month as long as the outer row is slightly smaller than the next row.
- d) All blossoms – even the tiniest – must be removed so that the strength of the plant goes toward growing lush foliage. This should be done each time you groom the plant.

#### 6. Blossoms, like foliage, account for 50 of the 100 Points.

- a) Quantity of bloom is 25 points if enough bloom is present. A standard plant should have an average of 20-25 blossoms. A small standard (8 to 10 inches) should have an average of 10 to 15 blossoms. Large standards should have more so as to be in proportion with the foliage. If a plant has half the desired number of blossoms (50%), a judge would deduct half of the allotted points or 12 1/2 points. If a plant has only one-quarter (25%) of the number of blooms for the size of the plant, a judge would deduct 1/4 of the 25 points, or 6 1/4, etc.
- b) Blossoms not large enough for the particular variety may have up to 5 points deducted.

- c) Blossoms of the wrong type according to the description (single, semi-double, double) will have up to ½ point each deducted.
- d) Spent blossoms or blossoms of the wrong color for the variety will count off ½ point each, or 10 points if all of the blossoms are the wrong color.

## **7. When Should I Stop Disbudding?**

a) Doubles normally take a bit longer to come into bloom than do singles or semi-doubles. Ruffled or frilled doubles may take a week or two longer. There is no real guarantee as there are so many variables such as temperature, humidity, nature of the plant, etc. Growers who are very serious will often grow two or more of the same plant prior to growing for show, disbudding each one a week apart so that they can keep a record of which one worked best for show. In some environments, the accepted rule of thumb is to stop disbudding doubles at eight weeks, semi-doubles at seven weeks, and singles at six weeks. I disbud about one week longer for each, as my growing conditions are pretty warm and humid.

## **8. After Following Good Grooming Rules For Six To Eight Months, What Do I Need To Do The Week Before The Show?**

- a) Several days prior to the show you will need to give the foliage a good bath. You may use warm water with a few drops of dish soap. Distilled water is best, but not necessary. Rinse well and let dry well before putting back under lights. If there are any spots on leaves that didn't come off with this, you may try the vinegar and water to see if they will come off. Always rinse well.
- b) Check the plant carefully to be sure there are no suckers, stubs from bloom stems or leaves, or any small leaves that you have failed to remove. If there are small leaves, look to see if removing them would leave a gap or space. A space could cost up to 3 points and the baby leaf will only cost up to 1 point. It is best to leave it if it will make a gap in the symmetry.
- c) Prepare a list of your entries with the classes that they belong in (you will need the MVL description list in order to do so, as plants are classified by the hybridizer's description and not by the way they look). Plants entered in the Collection Classes will also need their registration numbers listed on the entry sheet. If you are entering miniatures or semiminiatures in a Collection Class, be sure they are all either miniature or semiminiature as they cannot be mixed. Check miniatures and semi-miniatures to be sure they are within the size requirements (6" for miniatures, 8" for semi-miniatures).

## **9. Going To The Show!**

- a) Be sure your boxes are big enough for the plants to be carried without touching the sides. Carrying plants to the show can ruin everything you have worked so hard for up to now.
- b) Pack your plants with something that will not shed on them. Crushed paper is NOT a good thing. I like to cushion the plants with store plastic bags rolled together in a ring for the plant to sit in and then fill in around the box with more plastic bags so the plant cannot move in transit. Some people cut a hole in a smaller box for the plant and then wedge that box into the larger box so that the plant can't move. Whatever you do, the idea is to secure the plant so that it can't turn over and to protect it from any dusty particles that might reach it.
- c) Complexion brushes work really well for giving the plant its last-minute touch-up before entering. Always brush from the middle outward so that anything that might fall from the brush onto a leaf will be taken care of on the next row.
- d) Check again and remove any blossoms that look old or spent, or any that might not be true to the color. They can count off up to ½ point each.

- e) After all of this, you should be entering a plant that you can be very proud of.  
PERHAPS IT WILL BE A BEST-IN-SHOW WINNER!



Colonial Mount Remarkable  
African Violet Association of Australia