

The Propagation of Fantasies

by Pat Hancock

Of all the beautiful blossoms that grace our modern African violets, "fantasies" have been my favorites for many years. They are also the most unstable, unpredictable, and independent of all African violets. They often seem to have a "mind of their own."



In many ways they seem to be similar to chimeras in that they are subject to change from heat and cold, fertilizers, etc. The first bloom on a fantasy seedling is seldom the bloom it will have when more blooms mature. They hardly ever propagate true 100% of the time from leaf cuttings. The word "variable" appears more often in their descriptions than in the descriptions of any other color pattern. In spite of all these negatives, they will always be my favorite African violets.

Many years ago at an AVSA convention, I noticed that two different commercial vendors were selling the same fantasy African violet. I noticed that the ones from one were much more marked and colorful than were the ones from the other. I inquired about it and learned that the commercial with the brighter flowers was growing them as though they were chimeras. The other was growing them in the normal way from leaf cuttings. The difference in the plants was striking and I asked myself "Could it be that some fantasies should be treated as though they were chimeras?" Chimeras do not have a complete copy of their genetics in the leaves, only in the blossoms. Perhaps some fantasies show a tendency to behave the same way.

I believe that many of our modern day chimeras are sports of fantasy type blossoms. I have even seen plants where half of the blossoms were fantasies and half were chimeras. Perhaps they are more closely related than we know? Is it possible that some fantasies would be more colorful and beautiful if we treated their propagation the same as chimeras, i.e. bloom stems or crown removal?



Several years ago I hybridized a plant called 'Buckeye Especially Mine'. It was a cross between 'Buckeye Cranberry Sparkler' and 'Buckeye Calico'. It is the only cross that I have ever Buckeye Calico made between "sister seedlings." Very close breeding is said to magnify whatever genes are present — be they good or bad. This cross produced several lovely Buckeye Cranberry Sparkler plants, many of them fantasies: 'Buckeye Eyestopper', 'Buckeye Easy Goer', 'Buckeye Extravaganza', 'Buckeye Evermore Freckles', 'Buckeye Elderberry Wine', 'Buckeye Enough Pizazz', 'Buckeye Electric Dream' and 'Buckeye Especially Mine'. My favorite plant from the cross was

'Buckeye Especially Mine' — hence, the name.

I gave the original seedling to my friend, Anne Thomas, and put down many leaves for testing. When the babies from the second generation bloomed, they were disappointing. Few, if any, were as colorful as the original seedling. They were pretty, but not as pretty. Occasionally, a gorgeous one would show up, but not often enough. We tried suckers from Anne's plant, but some of those were not the same. We stopped short of removing the crown as we did not want to risk losing the plant.



Then I remembered the plants grown a few years earlier by the two commercial vendors and decided to try bloom stems. Sure enough, the plants grown from bloom stems were much more colorful and amazingly like the original. About this time, Anne showed the original plant at the

Minneapolis convention. I don't remember what it won, but it was quite a hit and several people asked for leaves. I wished afterwards that I had advised them to try a bloom stem.

Bloom stems do not make as many plantlets as leaves — usually only one or two. However, the color will be the same on the resulting plant as it was on the bloom. If you are having a problem with fantasies sporting to solid or less colorful from leaf cuttings, I would suggest trying propagation with bloom stems. The method I am now using is with a product called **Clonex®**. **Clonex®** is a root promoting gel that can be used to start suckers, crown, and bloom stems. It can be purchased from hydroponic stores.

Cut the bloom stem about one inch below the bracts. Carefully remove the bloom and buds. DO NOT remove the bracts. Dip the cut end in the **Clonex®** — just the tip. Plant in a Solo cup with holes punched in the bottom. I plant in one half AV soil and one half vermiculite that is moist but not dripping wet. Cover with a plastic bag and place under lights. Plantlets may be repotted when they have six leaves.

See past issues of the ***African Violet Magazine*** for more information on propagating chimeras.