



## **AFRICAN VIOLETS**

### **(Saintpaulia ionantha)**

African violets like full sun during winter months and need some protection from the direct sun during the summer. In summer, shield from direct sunlight. In winter give as much light as possible, including direct sun. Failure to bloom is often caused by lack of light. When growing under lights, have the plants sit 18"-20" under a two-tube unit, a little lower if more than two are used. Watch your plants; if they look bleached you may be giving them too much light and they need to be lowered. Twelve to fourteen hours of light a day will suffice to maintain flowering.

#### **Temperature**

Ideal at 60-80F, or 16-26C. Do not let night temperature drop below 55F or 14C.

#### **Humidity**

High humidity is essential. Stand pots on trays of moist pebbles or surface clay chips.

#### **Soil**

Soil mixes and soil-less mixes are equally good provided they are porous. Commercial mixes such as Pro-mix are fine. If you want to use ordinary potting soil, mix 1 part perlite and 1 part peat moss (thoroughly moistened) into 1 part of potting mix.

#### **Water**

Water only when the surface of the pot feels dry. Push your finger into the pot near the rim. If your fingertip gets moist, put back watering another day or two. Do not water into the crown of the plant and never use cold water. Never let the pot sit in drainage water. Too frequent water at any time can cause wilting or the rotting of the roots. If the soil of a wilting plant is moist, do not water. Allow the plant to dry out, leave for a few days, then start to water again very sparingly or mist the leaves and enclose the plant in a plastic bag and leave for a week. If wilting is the result of rootburn caused by over fertilizing, leach the soil by watering with plain water, preferably rain or distilled water copiously, at least six times. Let drain and keep dry for at least a week. Then proceed as above.

#### **Fertilizer**

Use a balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20. Do not, however, use the strength recommended on the label but dilute to about 1/3 or less the recommended strength. This avoids root burn. Fertilize only strongly growing and/or blooming plants, about once every ten days and wet the soil thoroughly with plain water before pouring on your fertilizer. If you want to induce flowering, use a high-phosphate-potash fertilizer (i.e. high last number on the formula). When bloom ceases, return to normal formula.

## **Propagation**

African violets are propagated by leaf cuttings. Take two clear plastic glasses; fill one of them 3/4 full with vermiculite. Water thoroughly, let stand for half an hour then cover glass with a piece of cloth, invert and pour off excess water. Tamp vermiculite down, not too firmly. Cut off a good-looking leaf from the bottom row of your plant with a sharp knife. Dip a skewer in the vermiculite at an angle and insert leaf stem 1/4" deep and gently firm around it. Put your second plastic glass on top and place the whole propagator, which is what it now is in the warmest, lightest spot you have. In four to six weeks, plantlets should be visible around the leaf stem. Separate these gently when big enough to handle and pot up into a porous soil. Pop them, pot and all into a plastic bag tied at the top for about a week, then gradually open the bag, a little more each day, until the plants can take less humidity. If you like, you can use the same leaf, which now has shorter stem all over again, thus keeping your original plant good-looking. There is room in a plastic glass for up to six leaves. They do not mind a little crowding. Cut off the leaf as soon as the plantlets are clearly visible. You may then feed with very weak fertilizer, once a week. African violets are surely one of the world's most popular and loved houseplants.