



African Violet Care

Known botanically as *Saintpaulia*, the African violet is one of the most popular flowering houseplants. They are easy to grow for the beginning gardener, but offer a wide range of cultivars to satisfy the serious grower or collector. African violets adapt well to typical growing conditions found in the average home. Their small size means they adapt well to limited space, often finding a perch on a windowsill.

Proper light is necessary for good blooming. Avoid putting African violets in direct sunlight, which can burn the leaves. A window facing north or east is usually the best, especially during the summer. Too little light results in thick, dark green leaves and long leaf stems. Too much light results in stunted plants with short stems and small, crinkled, leathery leaves. African violets also can be grown successfully under artificial lights. (See the Purdue Extension Web site listed below for more details on growing under artificial light.)

African violets are somewhat fussy about soil. They need loose, well-drained soil with sphagnum peat as the primary source of organic matter. A good blend is one part good potting soil, one part sphagnum peat, and one part perlite. Or, use a bagged blend specifically for African violets.

African violets can be grown in just about any container, as long as it has drainage holes. Do not overpot; that is, do not put a small plant in a big pot. The size of the pot should be proportional to the plant, to ensure good blooming. Position the plant crown slightly above the rim of the plant and firm the soil carefully, allowing at least $\frac{1}{4}$ inch for top watering. If you are using an unglazed clay pot, use foil around the rim of the pot to keep the leaves from burning.

We recommend that you water your African violet from the bottom with room-temperature water, then drain any excess water in the saucer. If you water from the top, be careful not to get water on the leaves, as this will spot them. Whether watering from the top or bottom, wait until the top inch of soil feels dry to the touch before watering again. If you water from the bottom, salts may build up on top. Flush with water from the top about once a month to prevent salt accumulation. Fertilize your African violet with a water-soluble fertilizer, such as 5-10-5, about once a month. It is not necessary to fertilize during the winter months.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of growing African violets is propagating them by leaf cuttings. Refer to the Web site below for more specific instructions. You also will find information on how to divide old plants with multiple crowns. With care, your African violet can live for many years.

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For more information: www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/conhort.html