

Secrets to Blooming Success

There are many reasons why we love African violets, but the fact that they bloom tops the list. Very few other plants in the world can live in our homes and bloom so often with minimal care. Sometimes, however, even violets can pout and not bloom as well as we might like. There are a few “secret” methods that anyone can use to encourage better blooming.

Secret One- Bright Light

It's not much of a secret that an African violet will bloom best in good light. Light is one of the primary factors plants need to produce the energy necessary for the production of blossoms. Violets that do not receive enough light will often reach their leaves upward or grow toward the light source.

Grown at the window, violets should be within twelve to eighteen inches from the glass. A large window is always preferable to a small one, and windows that face the east morning sun are ideal since they are both bright and cool.

If there is no perfect window, then the grower may wish to supplement the light with a fluorescent light fixture. As a general rule the lights should be positioned about ten to twelve inches above the leaves and should be turned on for ten to twelve hours a day. Violets under any of the newer energy efficient lights may need even less hours a day. If there is too little light, the leaves will usually reach up. If there is too much light, the leaves may bleach and lose their deep green color.

Secret Two- Water

Buds dry off when violets are allowed to dry out completely, sometimes before the grower is even aware that they were forming. Violets thrive on slightly moist conditions, never being bone dry and never soggy wet.... especially never being left to stand in water for more than a few minutes.

Water from either the top (under the leaves) or from the bottom pretty thoroughly once a week and drain the excess water promptly. If the climate is a dry one, it helps to supplement with a bit of water halfway through the week to keep the soil from becoming too dry. Self-watering plants, wicking and capillary matting systems are also effective for maintaining even soil moisture.

Secret Three- Humidity

Along with having even soil moisture, the buds will survive better when there is some humidity in the air. Drafty currents of dry air are especially hard on buds. Ideally the humidity should be at 40-50%.

Secret Four – Fertilizing

Starving violets lack the energy to bloom. Many growers have the best success fertilizing once a week with a mild fertilizer designed for African violets. A balanced formula such as a 20-20-20 or one that has slightly more phosphorus, like a 15-20-15 will do well in most growing situations. Read the package! If the fertilizer gives directions for once-a-month watering (eg. 1 teaspoon per gallon of water monthly), the formula may be adjusted by cutting the fertilizer ratio by 4 (eg. ¼ teaspoon per gallon weekly).

Secret Five- Potting Mix and Keeping the Roots Happy

Healthy violet roots can only grow in potting mixtures that don't inhibit their development. When violets have roots that fill the pot, they are more likely to bloom.

To encourage better root development, use a potting mix with lots of porosity (the fancy word for fluffy and full of air). A violet mix with plenty of perlite will allow air (and roots) to move freely through the particles of peat moss. A good recipe for potting mix is one part each of Canadian sphagnum peat moss, perlite and vermiculite. If using a commercial African violet potting mix from the store, it is often best to mix it half and half with perlite to achieve a mix that won't pack into a heavy ball.

Secret Six- Choose the Right Pot

Violets in nature do not grow in dirt. Instead they are found clinging to moss-covered rocks, with roots that reach into the cracks where mulched leaf matter can be found. Growers have found that the best way to duplicate that environment is to keep them in pots that are one-third the diameter of the plant and usually not more than two or three inches deep. Violets tend to bloom when their roots become crowded. Bigger pots tend to allow the plant to expend lots of energy making roots instead of flowers.

Secret Seven- Choose the Right Violets

Some violets are simply shy bloomers. They do not have the genetic tendency to bloom freely. Other violets not only bloom often, but the blossom stems carry more buds. Those are the most desirable varieties! If a violet refuses to bloom after using all these tips, it probably isn't the grower who is at fault.

Secret Eight- Threaten Them!

A gently threatened violet is often a blooming violet. The survival of the species instinct causes plants to increase photosynthesis and to try to make seed (by blooming) when there is a possibility of death. Confining roots in small pots or grooming off fading leaves and flowers will all stimulate the development of more flowers.

Yet another simple trick is to tap the pot of a non-blooming violet firmly on a hard surface to disturb the roots. This minor earthquake often results in flowering within a month or two.

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