

Petal Tones

The newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of
The Gesneriad Society

Volume 39, number 6

June/July 2008

President's Message

Greetings everyone!

It's about time for the summer heat to hit here. Perhaps by the time this issue of *Petal Tones* comes out it will already be hot here. This is the time of year when our club takes a hiatus from meetings to allow everyone time for summer activities. The last group activity for a while – other than the convention planning meeting in July – will be the summer picnic to be held in the Sweetgum picnic area of Greenbelt Park (same place as last year). The park has a lot of tables in the shade and is quite pleasant even on a hot summer day. This is a great time to invite along a friend to simply enjoy a beautiful day and share some extra plants or pick up something new. As usual, I have a lot of plants I'd like to find alternate homes for, so come check it out. We'll start sometime around 10:30 AM. Bring something you'd like to cook on the grill and a dish to pass. We'll also have a short business meeting as we have some things to discuss about the 2009 Gesneriad Society convention before the 2008 Denver Convention.

Happy growing,
Carol

Kohleria 'Peridot's Mango Martini'



©2008 Carol Hamelink

Picnic Details

Time: 10:30 on Saturday June 14. (In case of rain, Sunday June 15)

Food and beverages: Please bring food to grill, as well as dishes to share, dessert and drinks.

Raffle/swap plants: Please bring gesneriads and yard plants etc.

Place: Greenbelt Park, Greenbelt, Maryland. Sweetgum picnic area.

Directions:

From I-95, take Exit 23 Route 201 Kenilworth Avenue South (toward Bladensburg) to Route 193 East Greenbelt Road. (Greenbelt Road is an overpass over Route 201.) The park is a quarter mile on the right hand side of Greenbelt Road across from Fridays restaurant and Marriott Courtyard.

From 295 north (Baltimore-Washington Parkway), veer right onto Route 193 Greenbelt Road West. The Greenway shopping center is on the left. The park is on the left hand side at the 3rd traffic light across from Friday's restaurant, Capitol Cadillac, and Marriott Courtyard.

The Sweetgum Picnic Area is near the entrance of the park. Enter the park, turn right at the stop sign. The Sweetgum Picnic Area is the first left.

Upcoming Events:

June 14, 2008: picnic, 10:30 am Greenbelt Park

July 19, 2008 (tentative): post-Denver and pre-DC Convention meeting *chez* Jim Roberts. More details by email in July.

How To Grow Achimenes: The Untold Story!

by Serge Saliba

(Achimenes grower and hybridizer)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/gesneriads/>



©2007 Serge Saliba

This photograph is – need I even say it – a stunningly spectacular scrumptious display. I asked Serge to tell us how he does it, and he provided a very informative article in record turnaround. I'm very pleased to be able to bring this to you. Serge is writing from Romania in South-Eastern Central Europe – that's where the Danube flows into the Black Sea. – *Ed.*

Growing Achimenes is not the simple fact of putting down a rhizome under 2 inches of soil and then watering and fertilizing – it's much more than that!

Getting a huge stunning mass of colors and a very compact well-ramified plant with lots of blooms requires a whole procedure which could be slightly different depending on the varieties' habit (erect, semi-erect and hanging varieties).

This procedure begins from the moment the rhizome germinates and the first four leaves appear, and ends when flower buds start to form.

A rhizome which is planted on February 20th or March 1st will germinate during the first week of April. The two first leaves appear above the soil surface on a white thin stem that continues to grow and form another pair of leaves by the end of April.



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What we have to do now is to pinch the tip and eliminate the 2 or 3 youngest leaves on it. This procedure occurs when the stem is already 0.5 - 1 inch long. **IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO PINCH AT THIS STAGE OF GROWTH!**



©2008 Serge Saliba



©2008 Serge Saliba

Some growers recommend to pinch at 4 inches long, but from my experience, pinching at that stage cannot give the same results as the first one. In fact, the much earlier you pinch, the more ramifications you get! An Achimenes pinched at one inch long can produce 40-50% more branches and blooms than the one pinched much later when the plant is already preparing itself for blooming!

The most frequently asked question is: How many times should we pinch? The answer cannot be an exact number since number of pinchings varies depending on the varieties' habit; this makes the growing procedure different from one variety to another.

From my own experience, I can tell that the Tetras need to be pinched one single time and some could be grown without pinching at all. For example: Lach's Charm, Quick Step, Elegance etc. These can be pinched just once. Some Tetras such as Yellow Queen and others don't like to be pinched and should be kept untouched!

Regarding the erect (non-Tetras & tall), semi-erect and hanging specimens, they have to be pinched at least 5 times to get stunning cascades. Pinching has to be stopped when the first bloom buds start to form. Some examples are: Judith, Dot, Glory, Apricot Glow, Peach Glow, Ambroise Verschaffelt, Purple King, India etc... I pinch these varieties 5 to 7 times.

Some growers pretend that pinching can delay blooming, but I'm telling you, this is not true at all; sometimes a small delay of a week or 10 days can occur with some hybrids, but this is not significant. So, my dear Achimenes growers, don't let the pity control your minds – take your scissors and pinch! I know it could be hard to see your young tiny fragile

plants "without a head", but think that there will be 2 or maybe 3 or even 4 that replace every head you cut, only a few days after!

First pinching of Serge's Fantasy



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'Serge's Fantasy' pinched twice. For this hybrid, 2-3 rhizomes are planted in a 5" pot.



©2008 Serge Saliba

'Tetra Verschaffelt' pinched twice



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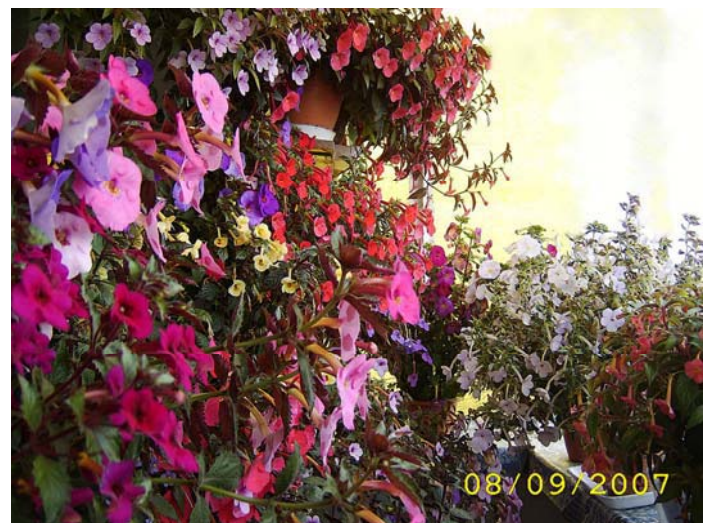
Another point that I find extremely important in growing Achimenes is the growing location!

To get the perfect results, Achimenes must be grown in two different locations before and after blooming.

Before blooming (vegetative period), I put the pots from the moment of germination (March) in a sunny spot, where the sun hits directly the tiny plants. They continue to be exposed to the direct spring sun until the middle of June when they start to form buds – then I move them into a semi shady spot. Why do I do that? Because when the buds open, the petals cannot tolerate direct summer heat and light – they will be certainly burned.

By this method, the plants will be very ramified, the stems will be robust and thicker, and the distance between two levels of leaves will be shorter – that means more branches, more blooms and more aesthetic appearance!

In both locations, air circulation is needed; without direct contact with outside air you cannot achieve perfectly your target, even with a good amount of light and temperature. Remember, Achimenes like to live in an open space, covered and protected from above but with lateral sides opened. They adore contact with the outside world. So if you grow them in a small greenhouse, be sure to leave all the windows open.



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I usually use 6.5" pots and plant 5 rhizomes in each. I prefer to plant few rhizomes – like that the plant will continue to bloom for a long period of time, much longer than a crowded pot!

Regarding temperature, Achimenes are known to be a "hot water plant" – they can endure extreme heat if you ensure them the needed water. But at 100F and above, don't be surprised if you see a drastic change in colors and shape; some varieties may be unrecognizable! You can see the peach color of Peach Glow turning into yellow, the dark blue of 'India' and 'Iona' turning into white etc... Some hybrids will have a faded color but all with smaller blooms!

Actually, temperature has a significant effect on color and corolla size. The ideal range will be between 76F-80F: at this range the blooms will be bigger, colors more vivid, and details on petals such as the "black eyes", dots... will be more clearly visible!



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The Second Quarter 2008 issue of *Gesneriads* is dedicated to *Achimenes*. See The Gesneriad Society's website for more information.

*** Wish Lists ***

Aarti Shah:
Seemania sylvatica
Seemania medea
Petrocosmea forrestii
Petrocosmea minor
Codonatanthus 'Aurora'

Hardy Gesneriads

by Jim Roberts

Now that the weather has finally turned and we're spending more time outdoors than in, it's time to consider what to do with the gesneriads. Many do well outdoors in a shady location, and some actually thrive in the extra light. Even a shady location outdoors is bright compared to most window light. But beyond putting plants out in their pots for the summer, you should consider adding gesneriads to the actual garden plots.

There are several groups of gesneriads that can be grown outdoors. Maryland, Virginia and DC are in an ideal position climate-wise to grow a large variety of gesneriads. Not only are there a number of alpine gesneriads that we can grow, but there are some others that are tropical that survive our winters and come back year after year.

Let's start our discussion with the European alpine. These plants are winter hardy in our area, without a doubt, but will have a hard time coping with our summers unless you provide them a shady location that stays a little cooler than the rest of the yard. Those of us in the country will have an easier time with these plants, as the temperatures we experience are a little more moderate than those in the inner cities. Plants to try are *Ramonda*, *Haberlea* and *Jankaea*. There are three species of *Ramonda* – *R. myconi*, *R. serbica* and *R. nathaliae* – that are available through the seed funds of The Gesneriad Society (at times) and the rock garden societies, as well as from other seed sources (Chiltern's Seeds lists them on occasion). The species are available in different color forms such as white, purple and pink. *Haberlea rhodopensis* and *H. fernandi-cobergii* grow a little more open than *Ramonda*, but all of these plants look similar to *Saintpaulia* with low rosettes of foliage and violet shaped flowers. *Jankaea* has been on my wish list for at least 25 years. It is available from at least one grower on the web, but I don't want to spend \$50 on a plant that I'll probably kill its first year in the yard. *Jankaea* is covered with fine silver hairs (like *Sinningia leucotricha*) and grows very slowly. It has been crossed with *Haberlea* to make for a slightly more robust plant, but still very hard to find.

Potted *Conandron ramondioides* in Tokyo, Japan



© 2007 Koizumi http://flickr.com/photos/casablanca_moon/



The Asia alpines come from China and Japan. I've over-wintered both *Conandron* and *Optithandra* in Baltimore, so they should do well anywhere in the area. Both of these plants go semi-dormant for the winter. *Conandron* makes a tight little leaf bundle that unfurls in the spring when the weather warms. Flowers on *C. ramondioides* come in purple, white and pink forms, and have pointed petals giving them a star shape. *Opithandra primuloides* also comes in a variety of flower colors. Most of the outer leaves die back over the winter, leaving just a central bundle of tiny leaves. Both of these plants need to have a protective covering of leaves or straw to protect them from extreme cold. In nature they are snow-covered, but we don't get enough snow to keep them at 32°F.

Lysionotus and *Hemiboea* are also marginally hardy in this area. Some of the *Briggsia* may be too, but I haven't tried any yet. Both produce thick underground rhizomes which send up new growth in the spring. *Hemiboea subcapitata* has proven itself many years in a row, although it still hasn't emerged this year for some reason. A protective cover over the ground when they go dormant will help keep the ground frozen. Freeze thaw cycles are not good for the dormant rhizomes. The last time I lost *Hemiboea* was when the squirrels discovered how tasty the rhizomes were and dug up every single one. They can get to be quite large; I remember seeing one of the squirrels with a long white "something" that looked like a white German sausage. Turned out it was one of the *Hemiboea* rhizomes.

Then there are plants which are not supposed to be hardy, that come from tropical areas, but which seem unfazed by our winters. *Titanotrichum oldhamii* is sometimes sold as Summer Foxglove. The spikes of mustard yellow flowers with the brick red interior are a real sight when they show up in late August. Again, these plants are rhizomatous and re-emerge late in the spring each year. I believe they originated from Hong Kong, not a very "alpine" place.

Titanotrichum oldhamii in John Boggan's garden.



© John Boggan

Other Asian gesneriads have surprised us too with their ability to survive our winters. John Boggan reports that *Raphiocarpus petelotii* from Vietnam survives in his garden in DC. It doesn't flower, but it survives the winter. I wonder when someone will start to test some of the higher altitude *Petrocosmea* and *Chirita* in the garden. They're already being grown outdoors in England and the Pacific Northwest. It's only a matter of time (especially with global warming giving us a hand) that we'll be using them as fillers in the garden like Hens and Chicks or Pansies.

Raphiocarpus petelotii in John Boggan's garden.



© John Boggan

The final group that I'm going to mention comes from South America. *Sinningia* have a very wide range throughout Brazil. Some have proven themselves to be quite hardy, even as far north as New England. *Sinningia tubiflora* produces tall spikes of white scented flowers. The tubers actually multiply underground like potatoes and the clump gets bigger each year. This hardiness trait gets carried over into hybrids with *S. tubiflora*, such as *S. 'Apricot Bouquet'* and a number of other hybrids that you can find on the web (try Lazy S's Nursery in Virginia). *Sinningia sellovii* with its dangling pink flowers also winters over in this area.

Some basic rules for all of the above. They all require excellent drainage. Wet feet in the winter will kill them faster than any cold snap. In the summer months the true alpine from Europe, China and Japan need protection from the heat. Not so the *Sinningia*. They REQUIRE full sun. They'll produce nice compact growth and lots of flower spikes. *Hemiboea*, *Titanotrichum* and others from

Asia want some protection from the sun or they'll burn, but they don't mind the heat at all.

So, in summary, while you're out puttering in your garden this spring, slip a tuber or rhizome or plant into the ground. When friends ask you what it is you can tell them all about this wonderful family of plants called gesneriads and then bring them inside to show them the rest of the story.

Sinningia tubiflora shoots



©2008 Kyoko Imai

Sinningia tubiflora tubers



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So You Crossed it...

by Kyoko Imai

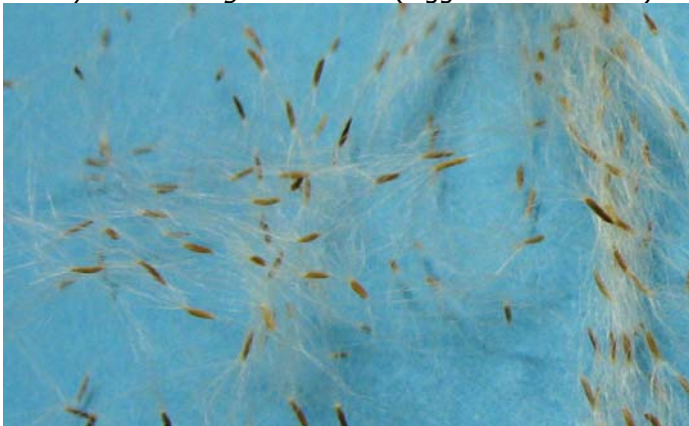
Time for a few updates. Remember the fun *Sinningia* pods Carol Hamelink created recently and offered to the group? Well, apparently she didn't keep any seeds herself so there's no update yet ... and it's up to those of you who got seed through Jim Roberts to grow them out!

Brian Connor wrote one day to say:

As I was rushing around watering plants, trying to leave for work on time... I noticed my *Aeschynanthus* seed pod had split (cross between *Aeschy. lobbianus* variegated x *Aeschy. Thai Pink*).... I touched the seed pod and a whole bunch of seeds flew out, floating away on little fine hairs onto the *Codonanthe* below (OhOh!!).... It was amazingly cool and a little disconcerting at the same time.....

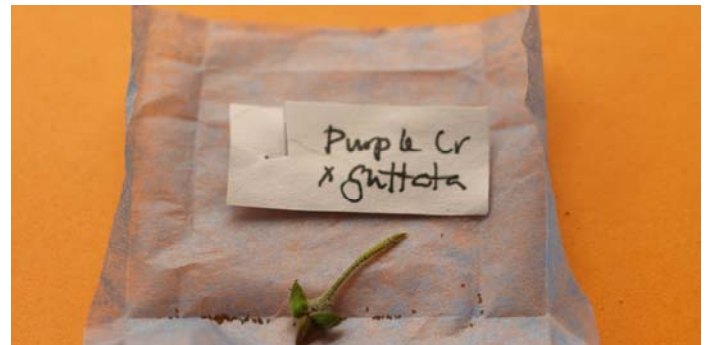
I can just imagine – it's an awesome sight. A very effective way to disperse seed.

Aeschynanthus longicaulis seeds (bigger than life view)



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As for me, well I lost most of the contents of two mini *Sinningia* pods as I got to them too late. I did manage to harvest one intact, and snapped a photo. I then folded up the paper, put it in a glassine envelope, and went to load the photo. Ten minutes later I decided to sow the seed but OH NO!! I couldn't find the pod *anywhere!* Looks like I've lost the whole thing now so I'll never know if I successfully crossed it - the mother plant sets pods on its own all the time.



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I've taken preventative steps on this *Chirita* by encasing the pod in tissue paper....



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Highlights from the May Meeting

by Kyoko Imai

The Raffle Table



At our last meeting, Jim Roberts provided a demonstration on how to pollinate gesneriads using Sinningias and Streptocarpus as volunteer moms. Here he is snipping open a flower.



The idea is to prevent the flower from pollinating itself, and instead place pollen from another plant onto the stigma.

The parts of a *Sinningia speciosa* flower



Pollination



Streptocarpus offerings (Texas Hot Chili and Bristol's Party Boy)



Seed pods should always be labeled and here's yet another way to do it. Jim warned that this method may be risky if you water from above – a little water on the label and it may be lost. I'd say that it's the same if you use price tags or paper and thread. Jim's method works perfectly if you bottom water and I've now adopted it. So far so good.



Jim also showed us how he sows seed. Take a pot, fill with seed mix, cover with milled sphagnum, sow the seed, spritz it with water, and then put the pot in a bag to hold in humidity (and prevent the seeds from flying around).

Seed Pot with Layer of Milled Sphagnum



Jim also brought in a pot of *Gesneria citrina* seedlings a few months from sowing to show us what a seed pot turns into (just like a cooking show!) and generously shared the seedlings.

Spritz Bottle



Thanks go to Naomi Pitts for bringing in a lovely *Sinningia speciosa* 'Lavender Queen' which she also generously shared, Denise Whitman for mama Streptocarpus and flowers, Brian Connor for Streptocarpus flowers, Ruth Ann McGrail for the mini Sinningias and a pot full of *Nautilocalyx lynchii* which she – need I say generously – shared with anyone who wanted a piece, and Tom Miranda for bringing in an *Episcia* and *Columnnea* (and yes, he also shared generously!). (I hope I haven't missed anyone.)

Naomi's *Sinningia speciosa* 'Lavender Queen'



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What's Growing....

Tom Miranda's *Columnnea*, which he brought in to our last meeting:



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Pentadenia orientandina grown by Carol Hamelink:



©2008 Carol Hamelink

Petal Tones is on a summer schedule and the next issue will be in August. Photographs and musings from your summer travels, summer growing, summer sowing, and summer wishing will be most welcome. And thanks to those of you who made wishes come true last month!

Columnnea minutiflora Grown by Carol Hamelink:



©2008 Carol Hamelink

Pinched tips (I pinched my Achimenes too)



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Seed pots on my shelf (update from May photo)



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National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC), a chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc. "The purpose of the chapter shall be to afford a convenient and beneficial association of persons interested in gesneriads; to stimulate a widespread interest in the identification, correct nomenclature, culture, and propagation of gesneriads; and to encourage the origination and introduction of new cultivars." (NCAC bylaws, revised April 1981.)

NCAC usually meets four times a year, September through June, at 10:30 am on the second Saturday of the month. All are welcome. Please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, or contact our chapter president (Carol Hamelink) or publicity and membership chair (John Boggan) for more information.

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