



Petal Tones

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

Volume 39, number 9

October 2008

President's Message

Greetings everyone!

I hope to see you all at our upcoming gesneriad meeting. This month's Dog Show should be a lot of fun. I'm sure all of us have had the experience of trying to grow a plant that just didn't perform. Well, this is your chance to bring that poor performer with you and get some advice for how to perk it up. If everyone brings 2 or 3 plants for the show, we should have lots of entertainment. Plants must be pest and disease free, but are not required to be beautiful. In fact, the farther they are from perfect, the higher they'll score. With all of the traveling I've been doing lately, I have a lot of potential entries. Now comes the hard part of deciding which ones have that special dogginess and should be brought to the show. For details on the Dog Show, see the schedule included in this issue of *Petal Tones*.

Happy growing,
Carol Hamelink

Announcement

The **Baltimore African Violet Club** presents their Fall Plant Sale at the Harford Mall, Bel Air Road, Bel Air, MD, Saturday, Oct. 11, 10am-9:30pm through Sunday, Oct. 12, 10am-5:00pm.

For sale will be hundreds of beautiful African violets, other Gesneriads, and exotic house plants, leaves, cuttings, growing supplies including soil mix, plant rings, self-watering pots and more. Experienced growers will answer any questions you may have. contact: Karen Foster, phone: 410-457-4434 or fancypos194@aol.com.

Next Meeting....

Dog Show

Please see the show schedule (prepared by Jim Roberts) on the next page. Please bring plants and submissions! As usual, we'll also have a raffle table as well. The 2008 Convention slideshow which was originally scheduled for October has been moved to the Holiday Party in December.



September Raffle Table

In this issue....

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Survey Results

Thank you note from Dale Martens (and Streptocarpus culture tips!)

A Visit to Brennan's Orchids

Upcoming Events:

Oct 11, 2008: Dog Show. 10:30 am, at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.

Dec 13, 2008: Holiday Party; slides from 2008 Denver Convention. 10:30 am, at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.

October 2008 Dog Show Schedule and Rules

Plants entered in the Dog Show must be free of disease and pests. We will be judging plants based on lack of care, unconventional growing techniques (growing in the dark or with the pot on its side) and the desperate need for grooming. There is no limit to the number of plants that can be entered in any class. The winner in each Section will be awarded a special prize, with a Worst-In-Show award to the plant least deserving to win anything.

Leaf spotting, wilt, damaged leaf edges, dead leaves all count positive in point scoring.

Fresh flowers, high bud count, clean leaves and pots all count negative in point scoring.

In other words: **DO NOT GROOM** anything.

Judging will be performed by a team of novices and will be followed up by tips on getting the plants in condition for a real show.

Division I – Plants in Bloom (hopefully not too much)

Section I: Tuberous Gesneriads

- Class 1 Trailing Sinningia speciosa (points awarded for stem length)
- Class 2 Upright Sinningia species (fresh flowers count against you)
- Class 3 Miniature Sinningia
- Class 4 Sinningia with an exposed tuber (asymmetry gives extra points)
- Class 5 Other tuberous Gesneriads

Section II – Rhizomatous Gesneriads

- Class 6 Achimenes, Eucodonia (aerial rhizomes add something special to these plants)
- Class 7 Kohleria (must be growing and alive, but that's about all)
- Class 8 Miniature rhizomatous
- Class 9 Other rhizomatous Gesneriads

Section III – Fibrous-Rooted Gesneriads

- Class 10 Trailing fibrous-rooted (especially non-trailing types)
- Class 11 Upright growing fibrous-rooted (obtrusive staking a big point-getter)
- Class 12 Out of Africa (Saintpaulia/Streptocarpus)
- Class 13 Chirita, Petrocosmea and other Asian fibrous-rooted

Division II – Plants Not in Bloom (including those that should be)

Section IV – Plants grown for foliage

- Class 14 Episcia with brown leaf variegation
- Class 15 Other gesneriads with leaves

Division III – Artistic and the Arts

Section V – Artistic Design

- Class 16 "Who Let the Dogs Out?" Dog toy or other accessory required. An arrangement of cut plant material in a 12" x 12" x 12" niche.
- Class 17 "How Much is that Puppy in the Window?" An arrangement of "growing" material in a glass container.

Section VI – Plants growing in Containers

- Class 18 Natural Planting – plants growing in a natural material
- Class 19 Dish Garden
- Class 20 Terrarium

Section VII – Photography

- Class 21 Color print
- Class 22 Monochrome print

The National Capital Chapter of the Gesneriad Society sincerely apologizes to all our canine friends. The use of the name Dog is not in any way meant to malign our dear friends, but is only being used to distinguish these plants from those which would normally appear in a show.

History and Culture of Streptocarpus Part II: Culture by Brian Connor

For the most part, Streptocarpus culture is not terribly difficult. Most cultural problems begin with watering (especially wick watering) Streptocarpus and finding an appropriate soil mix.



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From Brian's presentation at the September meeting: *Streptocarpus* 'Iced Pink Flamingo,' 'Good Hope,' 'Spin Art,' 'Persian Carpet.'

- **LIGHT:** Streptocarpus, like African violets, enjoy bright light but not many hours of direct sun. Of course, natural light can vary from window to window, depending on many factors. Usually, east and west-facing windows are the best because they tend to provide early morning/late afternoon sunlight. Plants may need to be placed several feet away from a southern exposure. Either 2-4 tube fluorescent fixtures give excellent results.
- **HUMIDITY:** Moderate (30%), humidity doesn't need to be high for flowering
- **TEMPERATURE:** Daytime temp of 65°-80° F and 55°-75° F nighttime temp is best. Temperatures above 85-90° F will cause some varieties to wilt.
- **WATERING:** Here is a way Streptocarpus differ from AVs. Streptocarpus like to dry out more than AVs (surface dry, ¼ inch - dry) if you are watering by hand. If wick watering, use a MUCH lighter mix than for your AVs. I hate to admit it,

but on rare occasions Streptocarpus have survived extreme wilting when plants have been "forgotten" or their wick has dried up or become dysfunctional.



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Limp *Streptocarpus* (rexii x gardenii). Note how the leaves are so limp, they are hugging the pot. (Also note that this is your editor's growing habits, not Brian's.)



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The same *Streptocarpus* 36 hours after watering.

- **FEEDING:** When wicking, I regularly use **half strength** (per label) 20/20/20 CONSTANTLY. I have used Miracle Gro Tomato (the pink powder) routinely. I have also used Schultz and Peters, AV fertilizers (half strength). And I add 2 tablespoons Hydrogen Peroxide per gallon of fertilizer to keep algae out of my wicking reservoirs.

- Once a month switch to a 12-36-14.
- Lately I have been using some hydroponics type fertilizers that seem to work well.
- If not wicking, feed at half strength at every watering or every 2 weeks at regular strength.
- Please refer to the recommendation from Dale Martens regarding feeding UREA-free high-N fertilizers in this issue.

- **POTTING:** Repot every 6 months to 1 year. Do not over-pot; under-potting is preferable.
- **SOIL MIX:** If not wicking, a well draining AV mix with plenty of perlite will suffice (even the Cornell 1:1:1 mix). When wicking add extra coarse perlite, charcoal and diatomite. My wicking mix evolves and changes but it is 80-85% drainage material and very little "soil" (but that means regular fertilizing is necessary!).



- Diatomite is a type of horticultural gravel composed of silica and is well known to orchid growers. Paradoxically, it provides drainage and aeration but absorbs water also. Diatomite comes in fine, small, medium and large grade. The fine grade looks like kitty litter and compacts too much (I think) for extensive use in my Strept Wicking mix. I am currently mixing the small with the medium grade diatomite. Also I insist on using *coarse* perlite in the wicking mix. This soil mix is an experiment in progress – so if you can improve it, please do so!

Brian's Streptocarpus Wicking Mix (currently)

2 ½ quarts Coarse Perlite
2 ½ quarts Diatomite (50% small, 50% medium)
1 quart horticultural charcoal
1 quart Coco coir or PROMIX (or sphagnum peat which I don't like as much)
3 tablespoons bat guano or dehydrated cow manure

2 tablespoons dolomite lime
1 teaspoon bone meal
½ teaspoon triple phosphate or green sand
Marathon if you like

MIX WELL and before use. Water well after initial repotting in this mix.



Streptocarpus 'Peachy Pink' baby, in Brian's mix.

- **PROPAGATION:** Seed, Division, Leaf Cuttings
 - Can propagate by seed which is very fine (1.8 million per ounce, according to Professor Moore)
 - Can also propagate by dividing multiple crowns
 - Leaf cuttings are the most rewarding method of propagation because you can get many offspring this way!
 - Cut leaf wedges or horizontal sections with the central rib removed. You can dust the cut side with rooting hormone powder if you choose
 - Bury the cut side of the leaf no more than ¼" in a well draining propagation mix
 - Like AVs, this process can take 2-4 months for babies to appear. Be patient!
 - Where each vein intersects the soil mix, a baby plant can potentially grow
 - Pot them up when they are large enough for you to handle



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Streptocarpus leaf cuttings.

- **GROW FOR SHOW:** Remove old flower stems as close to the leaves as possible. Trim (and shape) brown edges from leaves with pinking shears. This mimics the natural scalloped edges of *Streptocarpus* leaves, if done artfully. Disbud 9-10 weeks before show and fertilize with 12-36-14 or another flower booster. About 4-5 weeks before show, stop disbudding and use 12-36-14 again.

Streptocarpus are wonderful plants. There is more than one way to successfully grow a Strept! Try one!

Brian

Readership Survey

Thanks to everyone who responded to the readership survey last month. I received 30 responses, of which the member/non-member split was about 50/50.

I'm glad to see that no one had a problem with the file size being about 2MB, and almost everyone is happy with receiving it as an email attachment.

As for reading and printing, the breakdown came out as follows:

	Members	Non-Members	Combined
I print it out in color (if possible)	5	3	8
I usually read it on the computer screen, and sometimes print it.	7	5	12
I only read it on the computer screen	2	8	10

I'm now considering some slight format changes in view of these results.

Kyoko

From Dale Martens....



Dear Members of the National Capital Chapter,

Thank you so very much for the award of "Best Old World Gesneriad in Flower" which I received for my hybrid, *Streptocarpus* 'Dale's Lost in Space.' It is a cross between *S. Nerys* and *S. Space Dust* and has a fantasy flower. Many asked how I got all those flowers on such healthy looking, dark foliage. Well, I quit using "high bloom" fertilizer and use a couple of non-urea orchid fertilizers - 20-14-13 BetterGro and 20-10-20 GrowMore. I think if the plant has healthy leaves, then it will maximize flower out-put.

I so look forward to next year's convention in your area!

Good Growing!
Dale Martens

A Visit to Brennan's Orchids

<http://www.brennansorchids.com/>
by *Kyoko Imai*

I was inspired by Brian Connor – by his presentation on *Streptocarpus* and his visit to Lyndon Lyons – to visit one of our local gesneriad sources, Brennan's Orchids. This was an impromptu trip – an easy two-hour drive west from the Potomac side of Washington, DC. I-66 west, then some 27 miles south on I-81 followed by a short drive on local roads.

As I didn't do my homework first, I didn't realize that there was a local event on the same day – that meant that many of the sales plants had been trucked away.

That's not to say there was any lack of gesneriads. Here is a view of their growing house:



They also have African Violets:



You may have heard of their *Streptocarpus* hybrids with names beginning with "Shenandoah." Promising new crosses go through an additional step of quality control – they are tested in the kitchen window to make sure they will grow well as houseplants.

Streptocarpus 'Shenandoah Shiloh'



Streptocarpus 'Shenandoah Something Special'



Streptocarpus 'Shenandoah Sugarplum'



What was most amazing to me was the health and size of the Chiritas. These are also in the growing room:



Molly Brennan explained to me that these are all watered by hand, and in the heat of the summer they may require watering every 1-2 days. By hand-watering, any problems are noticed early and dealt with.

Closer views of the Streptocarpus in the growing house follow – I should note that these include their stock plants and plants ready to be divided. They are certainly blooming very well!

A final note: Brennan's Orchids will be having their annual end-of-season sale on November 7-9, 2008, from 10 am – 5 pm.

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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