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CLIPPINGS

A Weekly Column from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Week of March 26, 2018
For Immediate Release

African Violets – America’s Most Popular Houseplant

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A long time ago, my grandmother dedicated a portion of her kitchen to the African Violets. She had a stair-stepped shelf that must have contained at least 30 African Violets of all sizes and colors. Her passion for the African Violet rubbed off on me as I still gravitate toward them when I’m out and about shopping.



Although native to West Africa, the African Violet is the most popular houseplant in America. One reason is that they bloom effortlessly year around. Perhaps the biggest problem is deciding which variety to choose.

African Violets come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and leaf and flower colors. There are four plant sizes – miniature (< 6 inches in diameter), semi-miniature (6-8 inches), standard (8-16 inches) and large (>16 inches). There are also a few trailing varieties, but they are hard to find.

The foliage is generally heart-shaped, but may be any shade of green. The surface of the leaf may be plain, ruffled, fringed, scalloped, spooned, pointed or variegated.

There is also wide variety in flower color and type. Colors include white, blue, purple, red-violet, lavender, pink and bi-colored. But, there are no yellow or orange flowers. Flower types include single, semi-double, double, star-shaped, fringed and ruffled.

The African Violet requires consistent care and attention to light, temperature, fertilization and watering. Usually, windows with north or eastern exposure are best. Temperatures should be between 65 and 80°F. Fertilize regularly with a complete fertilizer applied at a low rate.

Watering is most challenging, with African Violets requiring moist, well-drained soil. Use room-temperature water and sub-irrigation. Place the pot in a saucer of water and allow the plant to soak up the water from the bottom of the pot. Repeat this when the top inch of the soil is dry. To prevent salt accumulation, water occasionally from the top, being careful to avoid water on the leaves.

And finally, be sure to attend the Siouxland Garden Show on April 6 and 7 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Sioux City, IA. This show contains 22 educational sessions, free consultation with ISU landscaping design students, and more than 40 garden vendors. As for me, I intend to check it all out, but especially any booth displaying African Violets. See you there!

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