

# ❁❁ PESTS & PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN VIOLETS ❁❁

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African violets are not immune to common plant pests and diseases. Most problems can be controlled with preventive care, proper growing conditions and cautious use of chemicals when needed. The following preventive steps will eliminate most problems:

- Isolate new plants away from your collection to assure new plants don't have any diseases that would otherwise spread throughout your collection.
- Sterilize starter leaves by dipping in a diluted bleach/detergent solution and rinsing with tepid water.
- Sterilize pots by soaking in a diluted bleach solution overnight, scrubbing off any remaining soil and rinsing well in warm water.
- Sterilize soil mix by cooking damp soil in a warm oven (200°) until a thermometer placed in the soil reads 180°, then cooking the soil for an additional 30 minutes. A damp soil mix can also be put in the microwave on high for several minutes (depending on your microwave) to sterilize soil.

Unfortunately, even with these precautions, pests enter the home through screens and as stowaways on other plants or food items. If your violets show signs of a problem, the following chart may help diagnose and solve the problem. Sometimes, a chemical assault is necessary, using toxic pesticides typically used for outdoor applications. The dilution guide following the chart suggests appropriate dilutions for these chemicals for indoor applications, but even at these low dilutions, these chemicals are still extremely toxic and should be used with caution, including precautions such as wearing plastic gloves and working in a ventilated area.

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
<b>Aphids</b> Small, green, brown or orange insects that suck plant juices from leaf or stems.	Plant wilted, foliage and underlying shelf sticky, insects attached underneath leaf or along stems.	Spray with Orthene, Diazanone or Malathion several times over a period of several weeks.
<b>Thrips</b> Small white insects that cut open pollen sacs and consume pollen. These are natural pollinators of violets, but their presence on your collection is unsightly.	Small flecks of pollen on blossoms, small thread-like insects scurrying around blossoms.	Remove all blossoms, spray Orthene or Malathion twice a week for several weeks.
<b>Cyclamen mite</b> Microscopic insects that attack new foliage in the center of the plant. Other species of mite may cause similar damage, but may not be as severe.	Center of the plant grows tightly and brittle, center foliage appears hairy and grayish, generally deformed. If blossoms form, they are small and deformed.	Difficult to eliminate; requires regimen of Kelthane, Orthene, Diazanone or Malathion spray every 5 days for a month, assuring all affected parts are drenched with the chemical.
<b>Leaf mealy bug</b> Large, white insect that excretes a white cottony substance, sucks plant juices from leaves and stems.	White, cottony insects appear on leaf underside, stems, and crevices of plant.	Remove insects manually if infestation is minimal. Large infestation treat the same as for Cyclamen mite.
<b>Soil mealy bug</b> Microscopic insects that attach to roots and suck plant juices. Excrete a white cottony substance that resembles waxy perlite in root ball and on sides of (dark colored) pot.	Growth poor, fine roots limp and brown, tell-tale white waxy excretions in root ball.	Difficult to eliminate because pesticide must saturate every soil particle to prevent a re-infestation. Best solution is to restart plant with a sterilized leaf, although multiple treatments of a Cygon or Malathion drench can be an effective control.
<b>Fungus gnats</b> Small flies that feed on organic matter present in the soil; more a nuisance than a problem.	Clouds of flies emerge when plant is disturbed.	Drench soil with Diazanone or Malathion. One application should be sufficient.

## PEST AND PROBLEMS OF AFRICAN VIOLETS, CONTINUED

PROBLEM	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
<b>Springtails</b> Small insects that feed on organic matter present in the soil; more a nuisance than a problem.	White, threadlike insects appear in plant saucers as water drains through soil.	Any insecticide should eliminate these insects, although some growers feel their presence indicates good growing conditions.
<b>Powdery mildew</b> A common fungal disease of many indoor and outdoor plants.	Whitish powder appears on blossoms, blossom stems and leaves, blossoms small and deformed.	Assure collection is getting good air circulation and temperatures aren't too high, install a small fan near the plants. A light mist of Lysol air freshener or a light dusting of elemental sulfur will eliminate the fungus.
<b>Crown rot</b> A fungal disease resulting from unsterilized soil and/or excessive watering	Plant wilts and does not revive with additional watering, crown and stems mushy and gray.	Salvaging and sterilizing a leaf to restart a specimen is the only resolve; assure plants are grown in sterilized soil, have good drainage and are not overwatered.
<b>Nematodes</b> Small, microscopic worms that live within plant roots	Plants wilt and exhibit lack of vigor. Look for brown lumps along roots.	Discard badly infected plants, saving and sterilizing a leaf to maintain the specimen. Light infestations can be controlled with several Cygon drenches, repeated days apart.
<b>Scale</b> Small insects that suck plant juices; form a brownish shiny protective armor.	Small, oval, shiny brown bumps appear on underside of leaves and along stems, sticky substance on leaves and table beneath plant.	Manual removal with a toothpick or pencil point is best for light infestations, a Q-Tip dipped in rubbing alcohol rubbed on each insect can be effective; heavier infestations can be controlled with any insecticide.
<b>Overfertilization</b> A common problem which often appears to be a pest or disease.	Center of plant dark green, tight, and brittle, rust-colored fertilizer salts are excreted from new, young leaves. Rusty ring of fertilizer salts appears around pot rim.	Drench soil with tepid, unfertilized water and allow water to run through pot for several minutes to rinse out excess fertilizer. Stop fertilizing plants for several weeks, then reduce amount used.

## DILUTION TABLE

CHEMICAL	TYPE	DILUTION
Cygon	Spray	¼ teaspoon per quart
Cygon	Drench	½ teaspoon per gallon
Kelthane	Spray	¼ teaspoon per quart
Orthene	Spray	½ teaspoon per quart
Malathion 50%	Spray	¼ teaspoon per quart
Bleach	Sterilization dip for leaves and pots	1 teaspoon per quart plus several drops of dish detergent
Elemental sulfur	Yellow solid	Use full strength, dust on leaves with paintbrush. Available in well-stocked drugstores.
Lysol spray	Spray	Spray light mist near plants. May bleach blossoms.