

# ✿✿ PROPAGATION OF AFRICAN VIOLETS ✿✿

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## POLLINATION

Although yellow pollen is visible on a typical African violet, the pollen is formed in capsule-like sacs and is not able to pollinate the flower unless the sacs are broken open. In the wild, a small insect, called a thrips, is responsible for violet pollination. This insect cuts into the pollen sac to feed on the nutrient-rich contents and unknowingly transfers pollen to other flowers. This amazing evolutionary feat works as a mechanism to avoid self-pollination and exchange genetic material between plants, thus increasing the variety in the gene pool. Unfortunately, thrips can become a nuisance pest if they find their way to your home collection of violets. Although they are doing their job pollinating your plants, their pollen trails can make your perfect blooms appear unsightly.

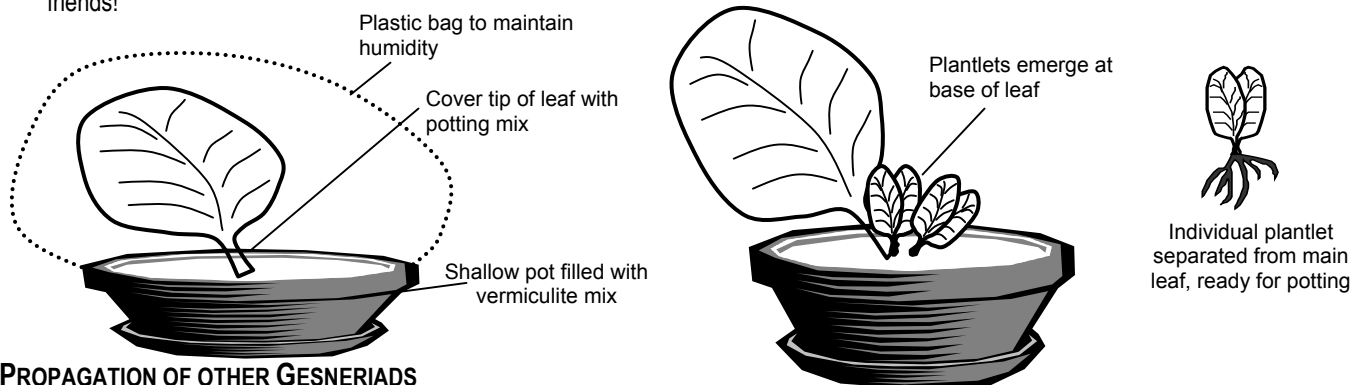
Unless disturbed by thrips or intentionally pollinated, African violet flowers will not produce seed capsules. Hybridizers typically use cross-pollination techniques to produce new varieties of African violets. While this is feasible for the hobby grower, once pollinated, seed capsules can take over 6 months to mature. Resulting seeds are very small and difficult to propagate. Even a successful propagation may not produce a mature, blooming plant for a year or more. Because of the genetic variation inherent in cross pollination, resulting plants may be completely different than their parents.

## PROPAGATION BY LEAVES

Fortunately, there is a "short-cut" to the lengthy and unpredictable process of pollination. African violets and other Gesneriads can easily be propagated from leaf cuttings, producing an offspring that is identical to the parent. This process takes much less time, often producing a new, mature blooming plant in less than 6 months. Exchanging leaves with fellow collectors is also a great way to increase your collection.

### STEPS TO LEAF PROPAGATION:

- Obtain two healthy, mature leaves from a healthy plant. Leaves at the base of the plant usually work fine unless they are starting to yellow and wither. Try to get leaves with a long stem attached, 1" of stem is usually adequate. Cut leaves can be stored for a few days and even shipped in the mail if the cut end is wrapped in damp tissue and the leaf is placed in a plastic bag.
- Fill a small container with your favorite potting mix; vermiculite or a mixture of vermiculite and perlite work well, also. Moisten the soil.
- Right before placing the leaf in the container, remove a small piece from the end, exposing fresh tissue.
- Place leaf stalk in soil at an angle.
- Cover container with a clear plastic baggie (clear plastic bakery containers make great mini greenhouses). Make sure to label the container with the variety's name and date you started propagation.
- Wait until small plantlets appear at the base of the stem. This usually takes one to 6 months, depending on the variety. The number of plantlets that appear depends on the variety and growing conditions, a leaf can produce only one or a lot of plantlets.
- Allow plantlets to grow until they grow several leaves and are a manageable size, usually about the size of your thumb.
- Separate plantlets attached to leaf from container and carefully cut plantlets apart into individual rosettes, discarding any plants that are too small to manage. Plant each in its own pot, making sure to label each. Keep the strongest plant for your collection, share the remainder with friends!



## PROPAGATION OF OTHER GESNERIADS

Other Gesneriads, especially Streptocarpus and Chirita species, can be propagated using the same technique. For Streptocarpus, remove part of or an entire leaf. Cut the leaf down the center, removing the large, main midvein. Place each leaf half into the propagating mix, cut side down. In time, small plantlets will appear along the leaf blade. Many trailing Gesneriads, such as Columnneas and Nematanthus, can be propagated by cuttings, typical of many other houseplants. Rhizomatous Gesneriads, such as Kholerias, can easily be grown by placing a small portion of the rhizome in potting mix. These small rhizomes form from the roots of mature plants and can easily be removed for propagation. Tuberous Gesneriads, such as Sinningias, are more difficult to propagate, as new tubers apart from the main tuber are slow to form. Using the leaf propagation method may produce results, but plantlet formation may be slow.