MINIATURE AFRICAN VIOLETS

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Although the horticultural industry has been well acquainted with the standard size African violet (Saintpaulia sp.) for many years and has made it one of the most popular flowering pot plants, it has not yet realized the full potential of its dwarf cultivars, the miniature African violets. These smaller growing cultivars are only about half the size of the standard cultivars, yet offer most of the colors, floral variations and leaf patterns of the larger cultivars. These miniature plants offer the grower advantages in their production and sale because of their smaller size.

The miniature African violet is for all practical purposes identical in form to the standard size African violet, but scaled down in all parts with the possible exception of the flowers which in some cultivars are equal in size to those of the standard cultivars. The average size of a miniature African violet plant is about six inches across when mature, compared with the ten to twelve inches of a standard size cultivar. The leaves of the miniature African violet may be smooth or scalloped and come in various shades of green, some being mottled with white on the upper surface. The flowers come in shades of blue, purple, red, pink, and pure white; they may be single, semi-double, or double. The plant has a neat and attractive appearance and offers good variety.

Miniature African violets are propagated by leaf cuttings. The cuttings should be taken from healthy stock plants grown under optimum conditions. Leaves used for cuttings should be mature with no signs of damage. They should be healthy and have about a one inch petiole. The cutting may then be treated with a weak rooting hormone if desired although good rooting will take place without the

use of one. The leaves are stuck about one inch apart. There are many diferent choices of medium which are usable as long as they provide the necessary moisture retention, drainage and aeration. Possible rooting media would be sand, peat, vermiculite or some combination of these. The leaves form rootlets and then several small shoots, each one producing a separate plant when transplanted.

The shoots produced from a leaf cutting are generally ready to transplant in about 5 months after being stuck. The shoots can be potted up individually in 2 to 2 1/2 inch plastic pots using a loose well aerated medium, such as two parts peat, one part soil and one part extender such as perlite or shredded styrofoam, amended with superphosphate and enough lime to give a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Plastic pots are used because African violet leaf petioles are sensitive to burning caused by the accumulation of fertilizer salts on the rims of clay pots. After potting, they should be fed weekly with a fertilizer solution such as 15-15-15 or 15-0-18 at a rate of 8 oz/100 gals.

As in the production of any plant, light and water are major factors in the growing of quality miniature African violet plants. Miniature African violets should never be allowed to dry out, the potting medium always kept moist, but not wet. If the soil mix is kept too moist it may result in rotting of the succulent roots, crowns, and leaf petioles; if allowed to dry for any length of time poor growth and flower production will result. It is important to remember that cold water on the leaves of African violets will cause spotting. Leaf spotting will be averted by watering with warm water or by the use of capillary mats to water from below. African violets are also sensitive to too much or too little light. Excessive light, such as in a improperly shaded greenhouse during the summer, will result in burning of leaves and flowers and shortened leaf petioles. Under insufficient light, poor flowering and leaf petiole elongation will occur. A good light intensity for miniature African violets would be in the area of 1000-2000 foot candles. One way of assuring proper lighting for African violets is to grow them under artificial lights; 600 foot candles for 16 hours a day should result in good growth and flower production.

Miniature African violet plants are not only attractive; they offer the grower advantages over the larger Saintpaulia cultivars with increased numbers per unit area and lower shipping costs. They present the retailer a good looking and saleable plant. Give these charming little plants a try.

References

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