

Petal Tones

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

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Message from the President

As Convention is upon us I thought I'd take a little time to reflect on the past three years. It was the Summer of 2006 and I attended a picnic meeting at Carol Hamelink's house. This was my first time meeting Carol and Jim, and most of the other members of the National Capital Chapter. I hadn't been to a Chapter meeting in 15 years, and the membership had changed a lot. Yes, many of the same members are still members, but most weren't at that picnic meeting.

It was here that I heard that the National Capital Chapter had put in a bid to host the National Convention in 2009. Uh oh! Did I really want to get involved in something that big again. It was in 1991 that the Baltimore Chapter hosted the National Convention. I was President of the group and Local Convention Chair. I thought about it for a while and hadn't made up my mind yet when I attended the Chapter's show in October of that same year. I didn't have any plants to enter but managed to put together a few arrangements for the artistic classes. This was when I saw the quality of the plants that this group was able to produce. I still hadn't decided what to do.

At the December Christmas party I was asked if I would be interested in being Show Chair for the Convention. Mind you, I still hadn't joined the Chapter and still had some fears of overextending myself. My work schedule was horrendous and I didn't know if I'd be able to do the job that the Chapter needed. To make this long story short, I joined and accepted the position.

Carol Hamelink was elected President at that meeting and I was elected VP. Between our enthusiasm and a new electronic version of the Chapter newsletter, *Petal Tones*, the Chapter grew tremendously over the two years of Carol's term.

Instead of half a dozen at a meeting, we were pulling in 20-30. Now we had a Chapter that had a real chance of holding a successful convention.

In December I was elected as Carol's successor. So here I am again, Chapter President and instead of Convention Chair I get to play the part of Show Chair. Life sure is funny how it repeats itself.

There are a couple of differences between this show and that one. In Baltimore I was the major grower in the group and took many of the awards. Here I'm still just starting out and have had some major setbacks with my plants as I've tried to rebuild the collection. I'm not sure if I'll be able to find anything to enter in the horticulture section of this show. That would have worried me tremendously in Baltimore. Here, it's just a setback for me. The rest of the group will no doubt provide for a tremendous showing. And the attendance at this Convention will

...cont.

In this issue....

Petal Tones at the Convention

What is a Convention?

Announcement

What to Do with New Plants

Upcoming Events and 2009 Meetings:

Next Meeting: Saturday September 12, 2009

10:30 – doors open

11:00 – program: Ken Meier's trip to Ecuador

Meetings are at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. New members are welcome – please introduce yourself for a free plant.

Meetings in 2009:

10/10/09, 12/12/09

be setting some recent records. Not just for people, but I believe the number of plants and other exhibits will be at an all time high.

I really want to take this time to thank all the local Chapter members who have been so willing to help make this all work. Our monthly raffle wouldn't work without participation from everyone. Speakers within the group have been very generous in sharing information with the rest of us. And because of who we've all become in this short time we've been able to attract national speakers to present to us.

At the end of this Convention we have some new challenges that we'll all have to overcome and work through. The National Arboretum has some stimulus monies from the government. Great. That means they probably won't shut down to the public like we heard was coming last year. However, it also means that the administration building where we've been meeting "forever" won't be available starting in October. There is a chance that they'll be able to find other locations at the Arboretum for us to meet, but we have to assume that we need another meeting place. Time to start asking around and finding something for the next year and a half.

Another big challenge is going to be to fill Kyoko's shoes. They don't look that big, and she's done such an excellent job of getting *Petal Tones* out to us that no one realizes how big a job she has done. When Mark Zukaitis had to step down for health reasons we gladly accepted Ki as a replacement. She has taken a super new *Petal Tones* and has made it even better. I think we should all make a point of thanking her in person the next time we see her.

At our meeting in June the subject was broached about replacing *Petal Tones* with a blog. However, I didn't get the impression that anyone there was going to be willing to post to a blog. We'll have to bring this up again in September, but please think seriously about what we are going to do.

I will prepare the September *Petal Tones*, and see how much time it takes to put it all together. However, I need help. I need articles. Articles from everyone about everything. And not just from the local membership. *Petal Tones* is read all over the world. We're a local newsletter, but I'll publish articles from Australia (how are the Leca stones

working out over there?), Japan (any new *Chirita* or *Petrocosmea* we should know about), Sweden (care to put a free ad in *Petal Tones* Ingrid?) or from any other gesneriad grower out there. Does anyone want to write a regular column? How about something about pest control? A question and answer column? Questions can be posted to members@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org and the answers sent just to me and the questioner. Then they can be compiled and put in *Petal Tones*. Lots of ideas, but we need articles to keep *Petal Tones* alive and interesting.

I think I've rambled on long enough. For those of you attending your first Convention, enjoy it. Take part in as much as you can. Talk to everyone you meet. Make friends. Invite local visitors to join the group. Buy lots of plants in the Sales Room. Plan on attending again next year. And the year after that. And....

Jim

***Petal Tones* at the Convention**

Have cake and eat it too – at least, something like that, metaphorically and electronically speaking, of course. We wanted to have the July/August issue of *Petal Tones* ready before the Convention, but what of Convention news? Could it wait until September? I think the answer is "no" – if I were missing the Convention, I'd want to hear about it sooner.

So how will we do this? We'll be running a little experiment this month: a *Petal Tones* supplement will be online in blog form. As I write this, all I have is a blog space and not much more, so quite honestly I'm not sure how it will work. I'll send an email to the *Petal Tones* distribution list at the time of the first post, and after that, you can subscribe to the blog's RSS feed, or just check it when you feel like it.

If it actually happens, let me know what you think – we'd love to hear from you. As Jim mentioned, this is one format we're considering for the future – we're looking at as many options as we can to keep *PT* alive.

--Ki

What is a Convention?

by Jim Roberts

A Convention is a place to make new friendships and renew old ones.

A Convention is a place to learn more about the plants we all love, and not from a book or a lecture, but from others who are also there to learn.

A Convention is the starting off point for that local greenhouse or arboretum that you've always wanted to see and can now see with 75 of your closest friends.

A Convention is a place to share - cuttings, knowledge, e-mail addresses.

A Convention is THE place to see how your plants SHOULD look.

A Convention is a place to buy, buy, buy - plants, cuttings, seeds, supplies and Gesneriad Society publications.

A Convention is a place to see plants from eons ago



Chirita lutea at the Denver Convention

and plants that are just now being introduced



Chirita minutomaculata

A Convention is the fun of a live auction where the bidding gets really crazy (\$900 for a leaf!)

A Convention is the fun of a silent auction and trying to be the last one in the auction room before bids close so that you get that plant collection or book or "whatever" that you really want and haven't seen anywhere else.

Convention is a place to see the small



Sinnigia 'HCY's Aries' at the Denver Convention

and the really tall.



Gloxinia xanthophylla at the Denver Convention



Arrangement at the Denver Convention

To see the newest species and hybrids, and collections of plants that will boggle the mind.



Bill Price's *Nautilocalyx* collection which won Best in Show in Denver



Gesneria 'Ako Cardinal Flight' at the Denver Convention



Streptocarpus 'Dale's Scarlet Macaw' at the Denver Convention

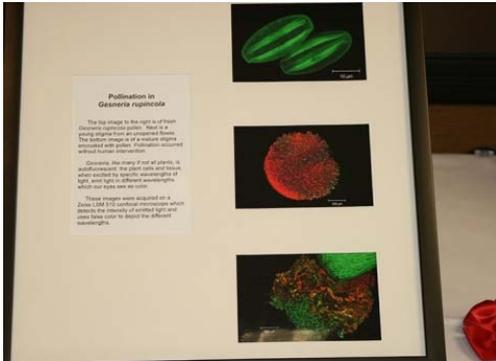
BE THERE!

Streptocarpus Update (*polyanthus ssp polyanthus x prolifus*)

Some of you saw this plant last year, at one of the Streptocarpus presentations. The seed is from Jaco Truter, courtesy of the Gesneriad Hybridizers' Association: JT 4-1101, sown on July 12, 2005. I only have this one left from that sowing, but I sowed the rest of the seeds from the package last year.

It's not a beauty, perhaps, but it's one tough grower.... Despite my growing it like a shade-tolerant cactus, it has kept on truckin'. After four years (minus a couple of weeks) it's finally blooming – although not exactly a candidate for the Convention.

Nevertheless, I like the small flowers and yellow throat. And did I mention xerophytic? Yes, the leaf tips brown and dry off, but I'm told (?) that this is a natural way for the plant to survive through dry conditions. So... except for the slightly big size for a plant shelf, it's working out well for me, and I might just keep the rest of the seedlings.



Educational Exhibit at the Denver Convention



Calceareboea coccinea at the Denver Convention



Yes, that's a plastic bag serving as a saucer.



Diastema sp. in ed luteolum at the Denver Convention



Announcement: **Begonias Abound**

The Begonia Society's Potomac Branch will be having its 28th Annual Show and Sale on:

Saturday, August 29th from 9 am to 4:30pm
&
Sunday, August 30th, from noon to 3:30pm

at
Green Spring Gardens
4603 Green Spring Road
Alexandria, Virginia 22312
www.greenspring.org

Green Spring is near I-395 inside the beltway, off Little River Turnpike.

Many different types of Begonias, including terrarium plants and plants recently collected in Vietnam will be available at the sale. For more information, contact Johanna Zinn, jazinn@cox.net or 703-323-7513.

* * * * *

Spot the begonia in my gesneriad prop box!



And as I don't actually grow many of these, the following are some begonias at Al's Orchid Greenhouse in Leesburg.

--Ki



Leaf propagation



What to Do With New Plants

by Kyoko Imai



Plants on the sales table at the National Capital Area Chapter's 2008 Show.

Humidity, roots, and isolation. I think those are the top three things on my checklist of things to do with new plants.

Many plants will be coming from a humid environment such as a greenhouse or a propagation dome/chamber. That means they are used to high humidity, and a sudden move into dry air can cause the plant to wilt to nothingness. To be safe, I put new plants in a humid enclosure - perhaps a vented container or bag - to let them adjust to my conditions gradually.

Humidity is also essential for plants that have limited roots: without a good root system, the plant cannot draw water up from the potting mix. Just because it's in a pot doesn't mean that it has good (or any) roots - it could be a recent cutting, or a root-challenged plant. I gently check all pots for roots - a slight tug at the cutting, visible roots growing out of the bottom, a gently unpotting just for a root check.... Gone (mostly) are the days I lost a new plant because I didn't realize it had no roots.

And of course, isolation. Regardless of how reputable the plant's origins, isolation is a good idea. By isolating plants, I not only avoid spreading pests and other problems to the rest of my plants, I also pay a little extra attention to the new comers and catch cultural and other issues earlier. All in all, well worth the extra space required for isolation.

And now for a re-cap of what to expect from a gesneriad sales table. Because many gesneriads can be propagated from seeds, rhizomes, tubers, tip cuttings, leaf cuttings and probably some other plant parts I'm forgetting, a sales table can have some of all of these in various stages of propagation.



New acquisitions from the raffle table at a National Capital Area Chapter meeting. Plants, cuttings, rhizomes.



Tubers and rhizomes in bags with chopped sphagnum moss.

- **Rhizomes.** Rhizomes can be broken into pieces and covered lightly with potting mix,

or even broken up into individual "flakes" or "scales" and sown on the surface of the mix like seed. The April 2007 issue of *Petal Tones* has a great article on propagating from rhizomes.

- **Cuttings.** If the cutting looks dry, it may help to soak it in room temperature water before planting it. Also, I always re-cut leaves and stems under water. Most gesneriad cuttings will root well when placed in moist (not soggy) potting mix. I usually cut *Episcia* into 4-leaf stolons with about an inch of stem. With *Streptocarpella* and *Columnnea*, I bury two or three leaf nodes, pinch off the tip, and use a very light mix. I prefer to put down *Codonanthe* and *Aeschynanthus* as two-leaf cuttings rather than bury 1 or 2 leaf nodes.
- **Plants in pots.** Some of the plants will be established flowering-size plants, while others will be seedlings or cuttings. Note the humidity and root issues discussed above.
- **Pots with string.** If there is a short piece of string (a "wick") hanging out of the pot, then that plant was probably wick-watered. In other words, the string dangled into a reservoir of water, and the pot was automatically watered as a result of the wick pulling water up from the reservoir. The potting mix used for wick-watering is usually lighter (less water-retentive) than a non-wicked mix.
- **Keep crowns dry.** Whether it's a plant or cutting, keep the crown or growing tip dry. The crown is where the newest leaves come out, and water in the crown can be a cause of rot. A corner of kitchen paper or tissue will easily soak up the water without harming the plant.
- **Watch plant depth when repotting.** If anything needs to be repotted, watch the depth at which you plant it. Some plants such as *Streptocarpus* should be planted at the same depth. Others will root along the stem, so potting deeper may sometimes be better.

National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

A chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.
www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

"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 meets several times a year on the second Saturday of the month in the Administration Building of the U.S. National Arboretum. For details, please refer to the latest issue of *Petal Tones*, the website, or contact one of the people below. All are welcome and new attendees are invited to a free item from the raffle table.

The Gesneriad Society website: www.gesneriadsociety.org
NCAC website: www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

President: Jim Roberts
2408 Henson Dr.
Marriottsville, MD 21104
(410) 549-2409
jim-roberts@hughes.net

Vice President: Brian Connor
3003 E. Monument St.
Baltimore, MD 21205
(443) 845-3423
Brian_Connor@bd.com

Treasurer: Larry Skog
611 Roberts Dr. NW
Vienna, VA 22180
(703) 615-2299
SKOGL@si.edu

Secretary: Denise Whitman
7607 Riverdale Road, Apt. 333
New Carrollton, MD 20784
(301) 306-0417
ddw4@hotmail.com

Directors: John Boggan
Jim Christ
Carol Hamelink

Committees: Hospitality: Lee Linett
Membership: John Boggan
Programs: Brian Connor

Newsletter Editor and Website: Kyoko Imai
petaltones@gmail.com
editor@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

Membership: John Boggan
jkb25@cornell.edu
(202) 328-8145