

Petal Tones

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

Volume 41 Number 2

February 2010

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Usually my procrastination does no harm. To me or to those I live or work with. This time mother nature put a real damper on my objectives to get Petal Tones out by Sunday, February 7, and to get a lot of weekend time in with my plants.

I have tons of moss growing in the woods around the house. All different colors and types, from the beautiful dark green carpet types to coarse brownish green taller moss and even to patches of moss/ lichens that look great in terrariums and dish gardens. I was even going to put a notice here that anyone who wanted or needed moss for the show for arrangements, natural plantings, dish or tray gardens or terrariums could come out and help themselves. Now I'm afraid it may not show itself again until after the March show.

I have a nice tractor with a snow blower attachment on the front. The snow from a typical storm gets tossed 30-40 feet out into the woods when I clean the driveway. This storm, however, proved to be too much. The belt that drives the blower snapped in half about 10 feet out of the garage. The rest of the driveway had to be done by hand shoveling. All 400 feet of it. And now we're going to get another 12-18 inches tomorrow night. Update: we got 27 inches here. My poor aching back and arms and shoulders and chest and Time to move further south. This is the weather that convinced me it was time to leave Massachusetts.

I'm all dug out and hopefully will be again by Saturday morning. Note: I wasn't and neither were many other members. We had to cancel the meeting and even though we still have a lot to discuss for the March show we're going to have to do it over the phone and by e-mail.

I know we have a lot of new members in the Chapter. These are members who have no plant show experience except what they saw at the Annual Convention in Silver Spring last Summer. PLEASE, don't be intimidated by what you saw there. There is no point value assigned to the size of the entry. A small, perfectly grown plant is just

Meeting Schedule: (All meetings at National Arboretum)

February 13thRoom opens at 10:30
 Roundtable discussion: "Tips and
 Tricks to Showing Up at a Plant
 Show" by
 Sherry Adams
 Paulette
 "Little Show" (more practice!)

March 12thPlant Show Set-Up and Entries
 1-5 PM

March 13-14th "Going Green with Gesneriads" Show
 March 13th Awards Dinner, Colonel Brooks at 9th
 and Monroe NE

April 10th "Alpine Gesneriads" by Michael Riley
 a PowerPoint program presented by the
 Gesneriad Society. Also, a rhizome
 Exchange – time to share those
 Achimenes and Eucodonia and other
 Summertime gesneriads.

Cancelled-Snow

judged on quality – good leaves, lots of flowers, ornamental value, cleanliness. There are points deducted if the judges consider the plant to be "immature." However, if a plant is of flowering size it is mature and an experienced judge will know that.

PLANTING AND GROWING A TERRARIUM WITH GESNERIADS

Presented By Neale Stuart-Merriman



The January program was, as predicted, quite a treat for all of us. Neale Stuart-Merriman has a strong background in building terrariums. That knowledge and experience came through loud and clear as she shared her techniques with us.

Neale brought a finished terrarium with her so show us what our efforts should look like after a few months. She suggests planting 3-4 months before a show so that everything will grow together. So if you haven't planted your terrarium yet, get to it now. You'll notice that she keeps the name tags in the terrarium. It's so very easy to

forget what's in the planting, and it's also very important to list everything in the planting for the show.



At the meeting she put together a terrarium in a 12" square container, using mostly gesneriads. She likes to allow one third of the terrarium to be blank; i.e., without plants, so that the eye is drawn into the space and experiences a feeling of being in the middle of the space and being able to look around as if the design **is** reality. Variations in height are important to add interest, and it's vital to keep plants in scale with the size of the container. Remember, plants grow faster in a terrarium, under high humidity and otherwise perfect conditions. If you choose plants that are "just the right size" today they may be way out of scale by the time of the show. Look for interesting differences in texture and leaf color, and if well balanced the space can look great even without an open flower.

A few additional tips:

- 1) Neale uses a mixture of milled sphagnum with a standard soil mix. Avoid anything with perlite or vermiculite. These materials are not found in nature and will ruin the natural effect you are trying to obtain.
- 2) Do not let the soil show, especially at the front of the terrarium. On curved-sided terrariums the front of the terrarium is on all sides.
- 3) Use live moss, or even sheet moss to cover soil that may be exposed otherwise.
- 4) Fill in deep areas behind rocks or driftwood with overturned pots or other containers. This will reduce the amount of soil mix you will need and also keep the overall moisture level of the soil down.
- 5) A grate or screen over stones at the bottom of the container for drainage, covered with long fibered sphagnum or nylon stocking to keep the soil mix from falling into the drainage area, will help keep you from overwatering.
- 6) Don't feel that the terrarium you put together is ONLY for the show. A properly planted terrarium is easy to care for and will provide months, if not years of enjoyment. You may have to do some trimming, and plant replacement as plants overgrow their space, but the increased

humidity make them ideal for an office setting where you may not be able to grow many gesneriads out in the open.

- 7) The best moss is sidewalk moss. For those who don't know what that is, it's the moss that grows in the cracks between sidewalk slabs. Here is some on my patio. If you want any, just come over and dig through 4 feet of snow and you can have it. If you break it up and put it through a sieve, each little plant will form a colony. Sprinkle the plants on a porous brick sitting in water in an enclosed container and you will always have moss available for a dish garden, terrarium or as groundcover in a bonsai pot.



Sidewalk moss (patio moss)

Step-by-Step to Planting a Terrarium



Start by placing large rocks or driftwood



Fill behind the rocks with soil and overturned pots and then start placing plants for height and color



Add some glass beads for a water effect in front and more plants to fill the space (leaving unplanted space to draw the eye in). Sit back and watch your version of a grotto by the pond grow together and become more real looking as time passes.

BRAZIL SEED CLUB

This same notice will appear every month. If you are a member of the NCAC and would like to participate in this seed club, just watch your e-mail for a list from Brian Connor. As Mauro posts new seed lists Brian will send the list out to everyone in the Chapter. There is no cost to you; it's part of your membership privileges.

Those of us who got seed in October probably already have lots of great seedlings up and growing. You can place an order at any time, so if you missed this order get your requests to Brian now and you'll be at the top of the list next time he orders. The second order of seed was going to be distributed at the February meeting. Since the meeting was cancelled Brian will mail you your packets if you placed any requests. If you don't have the latest seed list, ask Brian to send it to you. New lists are put out by Mauro several times a year, and Brian places his orders shortly after these lists appear so that we have the best chance of getting something new and exciting that has been added to the list. The NCAC is allowed up to 36 packages of seed a year. Send your requests to Brian and he will place the order with Mauro (three total orders of 12 packs each). Brian can be reached at: vicepresident@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org.

Naturally first priority will be for Gesneriad seeds, but if you see something else on the list, add it to your request. If we don't get requests for 12 packets of Gesneriads Brian will fill in with other plants if he has requests.

DON'T FORGET THE RAFFLE TABLE!

Raffle tickets are only 50¢, or 3 for a dollar, but they provide a great source of income to the NCAC and a great source of plants to new and old members and even visitors to the meeting. Items suitable for the table include any and all objects that plant lovers would appreciate:

Gesneriad plants, rhizomes, tubers, cuttings, seeds

Companion and/or garden plants, cuttings

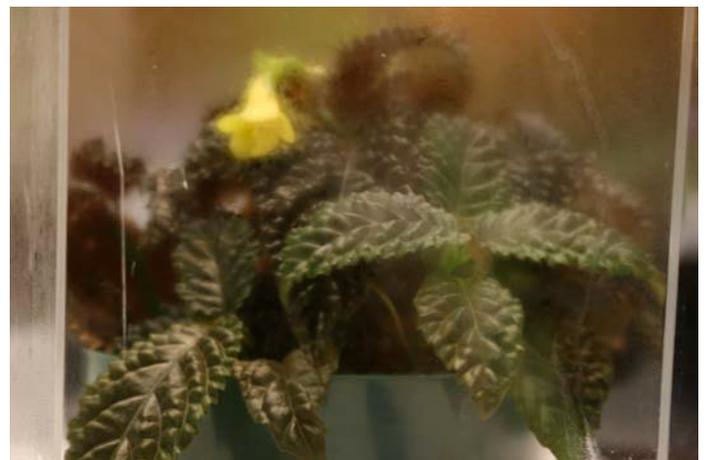
Growing supplies (pots, labels, soil, leca, sphagnum)

Gasteranthus – A Special Gift at the Raffle

Many of you may not know Robert Simpson. He hasn't been to many meetings lately, but we all should know him for the beautiful, large, perfect specimens of *Gasteranthus* he grows off in the corners at home and brings to meetings every once in a while for us to all drool over. I don't know where my mind was in January. For some reason I didn't get a picture of the large plant of *Gasteranthus atratus* that he brought to the meeting. Because I didn't get a photo of his plant I'm going to have to put in a photo of a much smaller plant that won a blue ribbon at Convention. By coincidence, one of our members, who wishes to remain anonymous, submitted an article on *Gasteranthus* for this issue before we knew Robert and his plants would come to the meeting in January.

But even more special than Robert bringing his plant of *G. atratus* to the meeting, he brought pots full of *G. atratus* and *G. villosus* for us to break up and share. I hope everyone at the meeting was able to get a piece of both plants and is growing them at home now.

Here's a plant of *G. atratus* at the Denver Convention in 2008.



It's really hard to get a good photo because it has to live in 100% humidity. As soon as you try to take it out of its environment, or even open the cover to frame up a nice shot, it starts to wilt. That's what was so nice about Robert's plant. You could see it clearly through the sides of the container.

The other plant, *Gasteranthus villosus*, may not have as distinctive a leaf, but the flower is still pretty dramatic and eye-catching. Here's a plant that I lost a couple of years ago and can now take off of my "desperately seeking" list (thanks again Robert).



GASTERANTHUS ATRATUS

By Anonymous

Last year Quentin brought a couple of *G. atratus* for our raffle table and I was lucky enough to get an early-drawn number so I snagged up one then the other one later on and gave it away. The plant can be overlooked quite easily, especially given the lighting over, way overhead, the raffle table.

G. atratus is one of those gesneriads that has very different, very strikingly-colored foliage that most growers would call black until the plant receives too much light which, for me, is anything closer than a foot away from the end of the fluorescent lights. In that case, the leaves take on a green color which gets greener as the plant gets more light. There's nothing wrong with this and the plant won't be harmed, however, one of the reasons for growing it is the contrast of a black, textured leaf with large, yellow flowers. Riveting, appealing, seldomly seen ... but well worth a bit of extra effort to achieve.

The extra effort comes in providing a tall enough terrarium or plastic bag in which to grow the plant which can top more than a foot, not including flowers, if it's happy. The leaves aren't shy either; they can be a few inches. Fortunately, for the grower with limited space, tip cuttings with two or three sets of leaves can be taken and propagated.

Growing: My *G. atratus* is planted in long fibered sphagnum in a plastic pot in a tall plastic container which is kept covered. Temperature inside the container usually is 75 or close to and humidity is high ... of the drippy kind that forms on leaves and inside the container. Light is indirect, from fluorescents, and the container is about 18" away from the end of the unit and also is somewhat shaded by some large alocasia and begonia leaves. I fertilize very sparingly (1/4 strength twice a month). Once a week I rotate the container a quarter turn to keep the stem growing as straight as possible.

Propagation is easy because every part of the above-ground plant will reproduce and it even sprouts from the base. A leaf or part of a leaf with vein(ing) will produce a plant or plants. Part of a stem, sans leaves, but with a node also reproduces. And, of course, there are stem cuttings and seeds.

In a landscaped terrarium, I suggest keeping this *Gasteranthus* in its own pot of long fibered sphagnum to make it easier to remove or shift around. Cover the pot top with sheet moss and contrast the plant's dark leaves with a piece of white quartz or other light-colored rock placed in back of it. It's an easy gesneriad to grow ... just keep it a bit below low light levels for its best color. Warmth and humidity are its other requirements.

MEALS AT THE SHOW

Lee Linett always does a terrific job coordinating meals for the show workers, judges, clerks and members at large. We didn't have our meeting in February to discuss this, so please get in touch with Lee at slinky238@gmail.com.

She plans to have a some snacks available during the show set-up on Friday, a small breakfast for show workers, judges and clerks on Saturday, and a lunch on Saturday for the Show Committee, judges, clerks and eventually all Chapter members who need a little pick-me-up after working so hard.

If you have a special dish you'd like to make, or would just like to contribute towards the effort, please contact Lee. She can tell you what her needs are. Thanks.

DESPERATELY SEEKING

If you have any of the following and can share, please get in touch with the seeker and make arrangements to bring a piece to a meeting or otherwise get the plant to him/her. If you're looking for something, send your request to the editor. Petal Tones has a huge distribution and your chances of getting something that you've just seen and

can't live without, or something that you haven't been able to find for a while are excellent.

BANANAS, CROCS AND GESNERIADS

Kyoko Imai

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| <i>Columnnea purpureo-vittata</i> | Jim Roberts |
| <i>Petrocosmea formosa</i> | Jim Roberts |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Maasen’s White’..... | Marlene Finch |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Falling Stars’..... | Marlene Finch |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Captain Blood’..... | Barbara Stewart |
| <i>Chirita</i> ‘Betty’..... | Lee Linett |
| <i>Chirita balansae</i> | Lee Linett |
| <i>Chirita</i> ‘Louisa’..... | Lee Linett |
| <i>Drymonia variegata</i> | Lee Linett |
| <i>Petrocosmea</i> “Tim’s Bantam series”-any! | Lee Linett |
| <i>Saintpaulia nitida</i> | Lee Linett |
| <i>Saintpaulia velutina</i> | Lee Linett |
| <i>Saintpaulia</i> sp. ‘Cha Simba’..... | Lee Linett |
| <i>Episcia</i> ‘Malay Ebony’ | Lee Linett |
| <i>Episcia</i> ‘Tricolor’..... | Lee Linett |
| <i>Episcia</i> ‘Ronny’ | Lee Linett |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Dales Scarlet Macaw’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Summer Parfait’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘Blueberry Butterfly’ | Brian Connor |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘HL Snowbaby’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘HL Boyish Grin’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Streptocarpus</i> ‘HL Purple Martin’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Sinningia</i> ‘Gone Salmon Fishing’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Smithiantha</i> ‘Sassy Redhead’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>XNiphimenes</i> ‘Lemonade’..... | Brian Connor |
| <i>Columnnea pulchra</i> ‘Orange Crush’ | Quentin Schlieder |
| <i>Sinningia pusilla</i> | Quentin Schlieder |
| <i>Raphiocarpus petelotii</i> | Quentin Schlieder |

Note: The list is getting long. If you get one of your requests, please notify me so that I can remove it from the want list. Jim

AWARDS DINNER

One of the best parts of the Chapter Show is the Awards Dinner. All the work of putting together a show is done. The plants are in place. Ribbons have been awarded. Weeks of talking to the plants (yelling at them?) to get them into perfect shape. Packing them up, along with hundreds of sales plants, into a space designed for half that volume and getting them to the show in perfect condition. All those jobs are done. It's amazing how much faster a show packs up when it's going out the door rather than being brought in.

On Saturday night we hold an Awards Dinner. Prizes are handed out. We get to visit with the judges and each other in the nice relaxed atmosphere of Colonel Brooks restaurant. If you would like to be a part of this, please contact Frank Daspit at FADipper@aol.com or Nell Hennessy at nell.hennessy@fiduciarycounselors.com.

So there I was, about two hours south of Tokyo on the Izu peninsula looking for something to do. From the looks of the guide book, the coastal side of the Izu peninsula sports a lovely drive and a million and half tourist traps - a teddy bear museum, a music box museum, some sort of a fairy tale museum etc. etc. - all crammed along the coastal road. Nothing looked enticing... but then on a second flip through, I spotted a tiny photo of a greenhouse with water lilies growing in a grid. Promising, right? Grid = named cultivars, and probably a fair number of them. Besides, it was a freezing cold day, so a greenhouse sounded like just the thing. The only catch: the place was called the Banana Wani Garden ("wani" being Japanese for crocodilia), which sounds like a kids' theme park.

It turned out to have several greenhouses crammed with plants, all very well kept. It's not luxurious, or architecturally noteworthy, or spacious or new: just a serious collection well beyond bananas and crocs. (I later found that the English name is Atagawa Tropical and Alligator Garden - a more accurate description.) The Atagawa area, like much of the Izu peninsula, has hot springs and the greenhouses make use of the naturally hot water. There was a banana house of course, but also tropical fruiting trees, a fern house, a bromeliad house, palms, Nepenthes, some 100s of species of orchids, and I'm sure I'm forgetting some more.

Walking through one of the first greenhouses, I almost fell over backwards on seeing a display of a unifoliate *Streptocarpus*:



Streptocarpus wendlandii. According to the sign, the common name in Japanese is Cow's Tongue.

This was when I realized this place might have an interesting selection of plants and wished I had more time

to look around. Then, I walked into this 9-10 ft tall wall - can you spot the gesneriads?



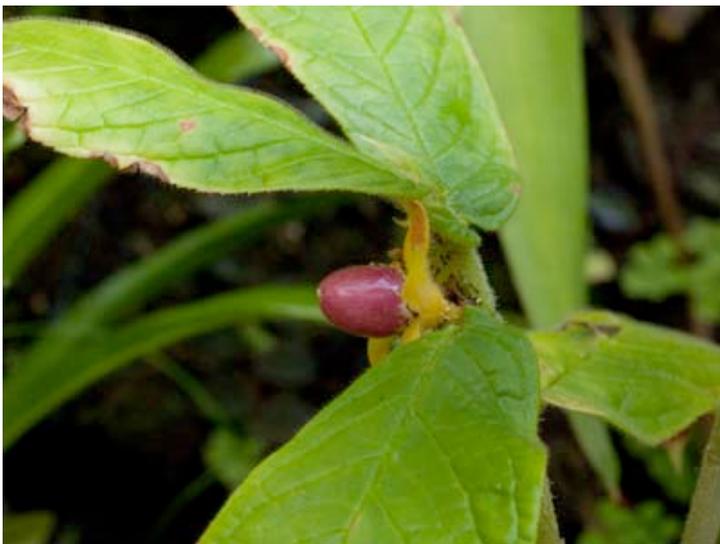
I only found a couple of tags on the wall:
Solenophora tuxtlensis, and *Columnnea schimpffii*. Here
are some close ups:



Further along, in an off-limits area along a passageway, I
spied some *Smithiantha*:



And what would be lining the walls in the water lily
house? Mostly bromeliads, but also a stray *Sinningia* and a
cascade of *Episcia*.



This really was an unexpected treat. I rarely manage to
step into a greenhouse when I visit Tokyo, as there aren't
many in the area. Atagawa is right on a train line, so I



might visit again. But, for my next visit - which I hope will not be in the middle of winter - I've flagged a botanical garden that is mostly outdoors. I doubt I'll find any gesneriads, but you never know....

FINAL REMINDER

2010 dues are due. If you haven't sent your dues in yet, please send them to Larry Skog as soon as possible. Dues are only \$10 a year per household address.

Editor Wanted

Contact Jim Roberts if you are interested in getting into the fascinating world of publishing. Three issue training period.

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.

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