



Petal Tones

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

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It's Show Time!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This issue of Petal Tones is a little bit different than our normal monthly issue. In it I'm going to be putting a little bit of information about our show, and how it is judged and a little bit about our April meeting. The issue is much shorter than usual, instead of our normal 8-10 pages, to keep down printing costs. That's right. This issue is being printed so that we can use it as a handout at the show.

BRAZIL SEED CLUB

In the interest of space, the normal notice about the Brazil Seed fund is being condensed here. The National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society belongs to a seed fund run by Mauro Peixoto in Brazil. Many new collections of seed are made available here, and members of NCAC can request this seed, at no charge, through Brian Connor. Write to Brian for more information at vicepresident@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org.

DON'T FORGET THE RAFFLE TABLE!

At every meeting members with extra plants, cuttings, supplies donate them to the raffle table. Tickets for the raffle are only 50 cents each (3 for a dollar) and everyone who attends the meeting gets one ticket just for showing up (including guests). Here's what you'll see on the table at a meeting:

- Gesneriad plants, rhizomes, tubers, cuttings, seeds**
- Companion and/or garden plants, cuttings**
- Growing supplies (pots, labels, soil, leca, sphagnum)**

MEALS AT THE SHOW

Lee Linett always does a terrific job coordinating meals for the show workers, judges, clerks and members at large.

Meeting Schedule: (All meetings at National Arboretum)

- 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.

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

We normally have a list here, in every issue, of plants being sought after by individual members. In the interest of space this list is being left out until the April issue. After the plant show and sale many of the wishes may get fulfilled and many more may get added to the list.

AWARDS DINNER

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 by Tuesday, March 9. The \$26 price tag includes salad, entrée and non-alcoholic drink. Choose between prime rib, salmon or Pasta Florentine.

WHAT IS A GESNERIAD AND HOW ARE THEY JUDGED?

Gesneriads are a highly evolved plant family found on every continent (North America, South America, Africa, Australia, Europe and Asia) as well as on the islands of the Caribbean, and many of the Pacific islands including Hawaii, Japan, and New Zealand. They have been compared to Orchids in their degree of diversity. Just as orchids are considered to be at the top of the monocot evolutionary tree, Gesneriads are close to the top of the dicots.

What makes them so desirable as houseplants is their ability to adapt to less than ideal conditions. There are miniatures for those with little growing space, trees for those with a greenhouse, upright growers, trailers and everything in between. This show should provide a good feeling for the diversity of the family. Oh, yes, Saintpaulia (African Violets) are members of the family too. I thought I should mention that since so many grow that one. Many are just as easy or easier, and others are a real challenge even for the most experienced of us.

With this type of diversity, how in the world are they judged? Well, first off the judges all have a lot of experience growing the many genera. They know the potentials of the various plants; know what they should look like and how they should grow. Examine the score sheets as you tour the show room. You will see points awarded for quantity of bloom in the flowering classes, and for ornamental value in the non-flowering. You will also see lots of points for issues such as grooming and the overall cleanliness of the plant, and it's overall condition (did it receive constant good care, or is there a problem that occurred sometime during its growth?)

A plant with lots of flowers is not guaranteed a ribbon in a Gesneriad Show. Plants are judged competitively in each class, and only one blue, one red and one yellow ribbon can be awarded. However, because judging panels vary on experience and knowledge, the blue ribbon winner in a class may not get awarded the "Best in Class" when special awards are handed out. Special awards are awarded by larger groups of judges and any plant scoring over 90 points can be awarded the "Best in Class" award, even if the team of judges that scored the class originally only awarded it third place.

As you tour the room, look at the comments on the score sheets that the judges make. They will often explain why a plant that you really think looks great didn't win the blue ribbon, or why the ribbon was awarded elsewhere. These comments are all supposed to be supportive and positive to encourage future participation, but in combination with the point tallies help the grower do a better job at growing the plant for the next show.

There are growers who enter shows to "rack up the ribbons." Gesneriad shows and exhibitors are generally not like that. You will see a wide diversity of plants in a Gesneriad Show. Growers are encouraged to enter plants to help educate the public as well as other members of the group. Something that is rarely seen in flower may be entered in the show even though the foliage is damaged or the quantity of bloom is not sufficient to win a ribbon, just because the grower has succeeded and wants others to see what the plant looks like in flower.

THE APRIL MEETING

Our April meeting will cover two very different topics, but topics that should be covered at this time of year.

Alpine Gesneriads: The first will be a PowerPoint program produced by The Gesneriad Society and Michael Riley called "Alpine Gesneriads." I have not seen the program myself, so I'm not sure if Michael's program only covers the "true" alpiners in the family or if it covers all of the "winter-hardy" gesneriads.

That's right, this diverse family not only grows in tropical environments, but also in parts of the world where winter snow-cover is normal and cool temperatures are required for survival. I have a plant in my garden that is native to Taiwan. It comes up every year and flowers beautifully with yellow and brick red spikes of tubular flowers. I also have plants that are native to the Balkan Mountains of Europe and others found in the mountains of China.



Titanotrichum oldhamii from Taiwan

The "Best in Show" at the 2009 International Convention held here in Silver Spring, Maryland was *Conandron ramondioides*, a Japanese plant. I've overwintered this species outdoors in a very protected location, but it came back for three years in a row until the slugs found it irresistible. Tim Tuttle, a *Petrocosmea* hybridizer in Pittsburgh, PA, finds that *Petrocosmeas* won't hybridize

or set seed unless the temperatures are down in the low 40's or even in the 30's. Sounds like they too might survive one of our more mild winters.



Conandron ramondioides from Japan

Grown by Bill Price of Vancouver, BC

Even some *Sinningia*, found in Brazil where snow cover and freezing temperatures are a rarity, will survive outdoors with minimal or no protection, as far north as New England. The challenge that most of us have is keeping these plants cool enough in the summer. If planted outdoors the true alpine plants need to be protected from the scorching sun we tend to get here in the Maryland – DC – Virginia regions.

Rhizome Exchange: A small number of plants from Mexico, Central and South America produce special underground stems called “scaly rhizomes.” Each scale is actually a dormant leaf ready to spring into growth when conditions are favorable. These plants are content to sit in their pot all winter without any water, or can be harvested in the Fall and stored in plastic bags, and will quickly sprout and grow in the Spring and Summer months. They are ideal for growers with limited indoor growing space but with a partly shaded deck or patio to put them on for the Summer.



Achimenes 'Purple King' in rock garden

A bonus to growing these plants is that they generally produce many more rhizomes than you want to keep for yourself so that they can be shared with friends, neighbors, or fellow Chapter members who are looking for something new.



Achimenes 'Glory' - Denver 2008

Bring your extra rhizomes, either in bulk if you really have a lot, or in baggies of 2-3 per baggie. We'll swap around so that we can all grow them this Summer and maybe have huge pots growing for our next show (Fall of 2011).



Seemannia nematanthodes

Bring Rhizomes of:
Achimenes
Eucodonia
Seemannia
Smithiantha
Kohleria
Gloxinia
and all other related plants and their Intergeneric hybrids.

Visit the Chapter website for information on joining the group or making contact with any of us:

www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)
A Chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

"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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