



# Petal Tones

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

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year! We've made it through another interesting year. The Chapter is growing, not only with membership numbers, but with active members who attend meetings. I remember when I joined the Chapter 5 years ago our holiday party had 10 of us sitting around a table. Now we average 20-25 a meeting. Keep spreading the word; invite friends and neighbors who admire the Gesneriads you have growing on your windowsills or under lights in your house. This really is a wonderful plant family that gets along with just about everyone.

What did everyone think of our new meeting space for December? I thought the space was great. Lots more room than the classroom downstairs in the Administration Building, and much better lit than the auditorium. I hope that when the Admin Building is finished with its renovations we have a space as nice as this temporary one.

We have a very full year ahead of us; Convention in Philadelphia in July and our own show in September. Both require a lot of planning, coordination and TIME. We'll have a lot more to discuss on both events at our February meeting. Oh, yes. Just in case you missed the Holiday Party and haven't noticed the meeting schedule yet, we won't be having a meeting in January. The Orchid Judges normally meet on the first Saturday, leaving the second Saturday for us. However, the first Saturday is New Year's Day so they moved up to our date and we've been bumped. With only one available meeting room at the Arboretum for the time being, this may not be the only time we get bumped. We'll just have to work through it.

By the time of the February meeting we should have our show location locked down and we'll start assigning the Chair Positions for the show. It's not too early to start thinking about how you'd like to help. There will be a list of Chair Positions elsewhere in *Petal Tones*. Look it over and if you have any questions about the Chair's responsibilities drop me a quick note. None of the jobs should be overwhelming for anyone, and I'm

## Meeting Schedule:

### Locations to be determined due to Renovations at the Arboretum.

**January 8, 2011 – Canceled** due to the fact an Orchid Society Leadership group is meeting at the Arboretum this Saturday. **Meeting is moved to February 12<sup>th</sup>.**

**February 12<sup>th</sup>: National Arboretum** (the trailer)  
**“Growing Plants From Seeds Workshop”** (more info in next issue!)

### March 12, 2011 – Growing Saintpaulia for show.

The only Gesneriad to have it's own society and its own specific rules for growing and showing. Learn from an expert (to be determined) the secrets to growing large perfect standard violets as well as miniatures and trailing types. Rules for judging violets in a Gesneriad show defer to the general rules as determined by AVSA except that the plants are judged competitively and not on their own merit (only one Blue Ribbon per Class).

### Meeting dates for 2011 :

February 12<sup>th</sup>, March 12<sup>th</sup>, April 9<sup>th</sup>, May 14<sup>th</sup>,  
June 11<sup>th</sup> picnic  
July 5 - July 9 in Philadelphia, PA - The Gesneriad Society's convention, hosted by the Liberty Bell Chapter  
September 17: show & sale (location tba)  
October 15 (note this is the THIRD Saturday of the month)  
December 10: holiday party

sure that for the first time in a number of years no one will have to Chair two different positions.

Finally, I really want to thank our new editors for taking *Petal Tones* off my back. I'll probably end up writing more than ever to put into *Petal Tones*, but having to format and layout and edit and all that other “editorial” stuff is no longer mine.

A great big thanks to Ken Moore and Donna Beverin!!

**BRAZIL SEED CLUB**

The new list from Brazil Plants was just sent out to interested members of the Chapter. If you are interested in growing new and exciting species out of Brazil please get in touch with Brian Connor. He'll make sure that you get a copy of the list. <http://www.brazilplants.com>

Here are the rules: You have to be a paid member of the National Capital Chapter of the Gesneriad Society. Each request should be limited to 3-4 seed selections so that everyone has an opportunity. That's it. Brian has a list of the current available seed which he'll forward to you upon request. Brian is able to order 24 packets of seed 3 times a year. Once he gets the seed from Mauro Peixoto, he'll either bring it to a meeting or mail it to you. If two people order the same seed, he'll split the packet in half. If more than two order he'll order two packets.

Mauro uses the funds we pay him to get supplies for his greenhouse and pay for repairs and help. We help in his conservation efforts by allowing him to collect and maintain many rare and new gesneriads, and also get those same rare plants into cultivation where they are less likely to be lost forever.

**DESPERATELY SEEKING**

- Gesneria* 'Yellow Bird' ..... Jim Roberts
- Sinningia* 'Snowflake' .....Jim Roberts
- Sinningia* 'Star Eyes' ..... Jim Roberts
- Sinningia* 'Bright Eyes' ..... Jim Roberts
- Episcia* 'Unpredictable Valley' ..... Barb Stewart
- Begonia bogneri* .....Jim Roberts
- Nautilocalyx pallidus*.....Jim Roberts
- Strep. cuttings/plants.....Jim Roberts
- Begonia smithiantha* ..... Donna Beverin
- x*Achimenantha* 'Dutch Treat' ..... Donna Beverin
- Petrocosmea* baby plants (have HT-2/Rosettifolia) .... Donna Beverin

If you are looking for a plant and can't find it, list it here. *Petal Tones* has a wide distribution and chances are good that someone will be able to get you what you want.



*Sinningia curtiflora* : tuber hardy to 30 degrees  
Picture of one of the Mauro seedlings given at last meeting.

**NCAC Treasurer's Report : December 11, 2010**

The current NCAC treasury checkbook balance is \$2,436.94 up from the October balance of \$2,387.94. The increase can be attributed to the raffle and memberships at the October meeting, minus the bank service charge of \$3. An additional \$20 from the funds collected at the October meeting were used to buy a share in the project of Jon Lindstrom at University of Arkansas for tissue culturing *Sinningia* 'Prudence Risley' for the Convention next summer. I wanted to let you know that the raffle at the December meeting raised \$91, and that so far 13 members have paid their 2011 dues. If you want to mail me your dues payment, my address is on last page of *Petal Tones*. Dues: \$10 year due in January  
Respectfully submitted,  
Larry Skog, Treasurer

**Official Name Changes as of Dec. 9, 2010:**

<u>New name</u>	<u>Old name</u>
<i>Sinningia.bullata</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Florianopolis"
<i>S. canastrensis</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Canastra"
<i>S. gerdtiana</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Gertiana"
<i>S. globulosa</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Globulosa"
<i>S. helioana</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Santa Teresa"
<i>S. muscicola</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Rio das Pedras"
<i>S. polyantha</i>	<i>S. sp.</i> "Waechter"

**Save the Azaleas**

Harold Belcher announced that the administration of the National Arboretum is indeed planning to raze azaleas on the south side of Mt. Hamilton and paint the stumps with herbicide. The boxwoods, tree peonies and other perennials are also scheduled for elimination. Much more information is available at <http://savetheazaleas.org>

**Experimental plants from Jim Steuerlein:**

*S.* 'Pink Tiger' x *S. bullata*



Pale Peach.....Joyce



Orange.....Donna

## Naturalistic Terrarium for Ecuadorian Gesneriads

By Josh Heath

Today's terrarium hobby has evolved dramatically in the last few decades, ranging from small tabletop jars to large public displays. A well constructed terrarium provides a stable warm and moist habitat for a multitude of various tropical plants, particularly sensitive gesneriads. One of the great benefits of a large terrarium is not only the ability to grow larger plants, but also to recreate a slice of the plant's natural habitat. For the last twelve years or so I have been designing terrariums in this way, focusing on different habitats and recreating them using the most accurate materials and plant species available. For this article, I have designed a terrarium to recreate a rocky slope in the rainforest of Ecuador. It will include gesneriads and other plants that naturally grow in that habitat and range.

One of the easiest ways to design a larger terrarium is to start with a glass or acrylic fish aquarium; and many already come with a glass top and a fluorescent light fixture that should be adequate for most gesneriads. If you plan on growing plants that demand higher light levels a multitude of different aquarium lights can be used. I tend to look for a fixture that provides at least 2 to 3 watts of fluorescent or power compact light per gallon of tank volume. For this display I used a 40 gallon tank (18x18x20) and one 100w power compact fluorescent.

Since this will be a rainforest display it will require a high level of moisture. I decided on drilling a hole in the bottom of the tank and using a piece of raised plastic eggcrate and landscaping cloth to keep the soil off the bottom. This will allow excess water to drain, preventing the soil from becoming soggy and stagnant. A small reservoir containing a submersible pump sits below the main terrarium; water will drain out from the bottom of the tank and be re-circulated back up to the top. The water will then drip down the back of the tank and over the rocks. Alternatively, an automatic misting system designed for keeping reptiles works just as well, or you can always spray the tank down several times a day with a hand mister.

The next step is to fit any decorations such as rocks or wood into the tank. Rocks provide texture and interest to the terrarium and many gesneriads grow directly on rock surfaces in nature. I chose to cover the entire background with artificial rock cast

from epoxy resin to recreate the side of a rocky gorge or ravine, habitats that many of our gesneriads come from. In the rainforest, virtually every square inch of vertical and horizontal space is used by plants.

A simple way to recreate this is to glue lightweight or thin rocks such as shale or pumice to the back panel of the terrarium using silicone. Logs, braches, and roots can also be used. Don't forget to create pockets on the background where plants can grow. To add support for larger pieces, I like to use a product called Beckett's Pond Foam available at the Home Depot. This is an expanding spray foam that is made to support rocks during pond construction. The foam dries in a dark gray color and can be sprayed between and under rocks and wood to lock them in place. Once dry it can be carved or sanded to help it blend in.

With all the decorations in place, the substrate or soil can now be added to the terrarium. Since the terrarium stays warm and humid, using the right type of soil mix is critical to prevent breakdown. I prefer to make my own mix fast draining mix that seems to last a long time. The basic mix is approximately 1/3 peat moss or African violet soil, 1/3 turface or laterite clay, and 1/3 chopped sphagnum moss; with a handful of fine orchid bark thrown in for good measure. Other ingredients can include sand, tree fern fiber, charcoal, or small amounts of leaf litter. Don't worry about exact ratios; just go with what feels like a nice open mix. For planting epiphytes, simply stuff long fiber sphagnum and some soil mix into the pockets on the back rock wall and branches.

Once the soil is in place, it's time to start planting. Since my goal was to create an epiphyte covered rock wall, I made a list of a few Ecuadorian gesneriads that naturally occupy that habitat. I tend to plant a mix of gesneriads and other plants that share a similar habitat together, this helps create a natural looking display. Try to tuck them into pockets of soil at various levels on the background, keeping in mind the potential growth and size of the plant. Companion plants can be added to provide interest and contrast. A striking specimen plant such as *Drymonia chiribogana* could be used as a centerpiece, or perhaps a large *Kohleria*. A few plants of *Columnea orientandina* and *Drymonia pendula* were tucked into the top of the rock wall where they can cascade outward. I placed a few individual *Seemaniania sylvatica* on the ledges and lower parts of the rock wall to provide color with their bright red flowers. To make it more realistic, I filled out the spaces between

the gesneriads with *Selaginella pallescens* and creeping plants such as *Ficus sp.* 'Panama', *Peperomia prostrata*, and *Marcgravia sp.*; which will provide a nice contrast in color and texture as well as provide support for the gesneriads. Non-gesneriad epiphytic companions include *Anthurium bakeri*, the bromeliad *Guzmania lingulata minor*, *Pleurothallis* orchids, and the climbing aroid *Monstera siltepecana*.



Figure 1: Tiny gesneriads such as micro *Sinningias* are tucked into rocky crevices. The green creeping plant is *Ficus sp.* 'Panama'.

On the ground layer a wide range of plants can be used, and many popular gesneriads are adapted to life on the forest floor. Some of the best varieties include *Corytoplectus*, *Episcia*, *Nauticalyx*, *Pearceas* including *P. hypocyrtiflora* and *P. abunda*, *Diastema racemiferum*, and *Paradrymonia campostyla*. For larger displays, bigger plants like the *Kohleria amabilis*, and *Gesnerias* can provide a bold centerpiece. Non-gesneriad companions in this terrarium include *Anthurium polyschistum*, *A. radicans*, *Bertolonia maculata*, and *Syngonium*.



Figure 1: Bird's eye view looking down into the terrarium. On the bottom right is *Paradrymonia campostyla* peeking out from the foliage, with *Anthurium radicans* to its immediate left.

The final touch in designing a naturalistic gesneriad habitat is to provide some ground cover to help show off the plant's colors and form. One method is to spread pieces of living tropical moss around the plants creating a background of green. Smaller groundcovers like the fern relative *Selaginella* work well too. A more natural approach is to cover most of the bare soil in the terrarium with a thin layer of leaf litter. A selection of dried fallen leaves forms a natural dark background that displays the gesneriads contrasting form and colors. Leaves from oak, beech, and magnolia are all safe and last a long time. Just rinse them under hot or boiling water first to kill off any potential pests.



Figure 2: *Seemaniania sylvatica* on the right, with *Kohleria amabilis* directly above.

## Growing Episcias By Barb Stewart



**Figure 3:** This display is designed to recreate the incredible plant diversity found in the high-elevation rainforest of Ecuador. Ferns, orchids, gesneriads, and many other plants occupy every square inch of available growing space on the rocks.

With the terrarium complete, a good watering is all that should be needed to settle in the plants. If the tank has a glass top, the humidity should remain high for long periods without misting. I like to mist the terrarium with warm water and a very dilute solution of orchid fertilizer every so often to wash off the plants, carefully avoiding sensitive gesneriad's leaves. Normally, the only maintenance will be watering, fertilizing and pruning. Just keep an eye on the water build up under to soil and either siphon or drain it off before it accumulates. In a short time, the new terrarium will become an established ecosystem that requires minimal maintenance and provides many years of growing enjoyment.

In my African violet club, I assist the horticulture chairman each month by giving a “gesneriad tip”. I have expanded on this by highlighting a particular gesneriad each month and giving some basic background and culture information. As a gesneriad judge, this helps me learn more about different gesneriads, as I usually do a little research to prepare for my talk. I also try to bring some starter plants to donate so people who are inspired can try growing them (and I can get some more room on my shelves). I try to have copies of a handout that gives basic information as well.

I started out this year with Episcias, since they are easy to grow and we have a number of novice growers in our club. I also had a lot of starter plants that needed homes after I broke down several large plants during the summer.

Episcias are New World gesneriads whose range is from Mexico to Brazil. They are fibrous-rooted plants which often grow naturally as ground covers. There are eight known species, but many different hybrids, most of which have come from *Episcia reptans* and *Episcia cupreata*. Both of these species have been used for medicinal purposes, to reduce fever and treat insect bites. Generally they prefer warm temperatures and high humidity. Most are grown for ornamental foliage, but many are easy to bloom and come in a variety of colors.

Episcias are usually exhibited in shallow pots with multiple plants in a pot. As a challenge, they can be grown single crowned with or without stolons. Removing stolons encourages larger leaves, and may also encourage blossoms on reluctant bloomers. A well grown exhibit should have good form and balance to it, and be in good cultural condition. If grown for ornamental foliage, it should have distinctive color, variegation, or iridescence, and no buds or blossoms with color. If grown in a terrarium, the container should be clean with no scratches or mineral deposits. If the top is opened slightly on the container, condensation will be reduced for better viewing by the judges.

Since I grow my plants on trays with matting, there is usually sufficient humidity for my Episcias. However, the pink varieties usually fare better in a covered container. I have had better luck with miniature varieties in containers as well. Episcias prefer temperatures above 65 degrees F, and may not

survive temperatures below 55. I once had a power outage as a result of a snow storm, and my house temperature was around 40 degrees for several days. Most of my plants survived because I had my plant stands covered with plastic. My *Episcias* did not survive, however, except for the small stolons, so it was not a total loss. Even with comfortable house temperatures, they can be temperamental in winter. I once broke down several large plants in December, and the cuttings did poorly, so I now try to do this in warmer weather. I also find that my *Episcas* fare better in the winter if kept on the top shelves.

*Episcias* provide constant color on my plant stands when everything else is disbudded or out of bloom. They grow quickly and make beautiful show plants, but for a fun challenge try growing them in a different way as single crowned plants or trained/sculptured in some way.



*Episcia lilacina* 'Blue Nile'



*Episcia* 'Unpredictable Valley'



*Episcia* 'Thad's Cheetah'



*Episcia* 'Pink Dreams'



*Episcia* 'Tropical Topaz'



*Episcia* 'Kee Wee'



*Episcia* groundcover in Mauro's greenhouse

Please write an article or share an article for our future *Petal Tones*. Send in a picture or two of what you have in bloom. These will be shared in a column called: Bloomin' Now ! You can share any challenges you worked through in raising your plant, share some history of how you grew it or give credit to the person who gave you the seedling or starter.

Also anyone who has the Jim Steuerlein "Experimental Plant" blooming or growing well please share with the group. Send in a pic! A basic digital picture will be fine!

"Mr. Gesneriad"

Next month, February 2011 a new column will be appearing called "Ask Mr. Gesneriad". Please submit your questions and they shall be answered by our gesneriad experts.

Send information to Ken or Donna at [editor@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org](mailto:editor@nationalcapitalgesneriads.org) or [petaltones@gmail.com](mailto:petaltones@gmail.com) or [Donnabeverin@gmail.com](mailto:Donnabeverin@gmail.com)

## **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.

The Gesneriad Society website:

[www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)

NCAC website:

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