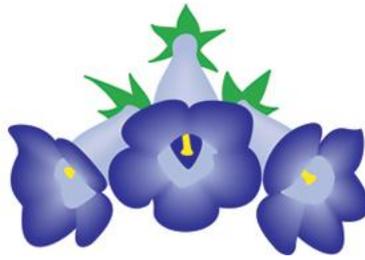


Petal Tones



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



My Trip to China

Disappearing Mountains, White Bees, Venomous Caterpillars and Grandma's *Primulina*

Stephen Maciejewski

NCAC's August 10, 2013 Meeting

Stephen Maciejewski will be speaking at the August meeting of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society. If you have never been to one of his trip talks, you are in for a treat. His trips are amazing, and he's an excellent and entertaining speaker!

Join us as we listen to Stephen, who is from the Liberty Bell chapter in Philadelphia, as he takes us on a 15-day journey into a seldom seen section

NCAC meetings are held at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. use the entrance at 24th & R Streets, NE, off Bladensburg Road

Doors open at 10:00am with the meeting starting at 10:30am on the second Saturday of the month.

Saturday, August 10th Stephen Maciejewski: My Trip to China

September 14th TBA

October 26th Bob & Dee Stewart: Streptocarpus

December 14th Christmas Party

of China. Follow Stephen & Professor Wei Yi-Gang, author of "Gesneriaceae of South China" as they travel 3,000 kilometers in search of beautiful, rare and still unnamed species of gesneriads. You'll see plants never seen before: many *Primulinas*, other *gesneriads* and plants like the cave growing iridescent blue *Begonia edulis*; plus spectacular scenery, including other worldly karst mountains, caves larger than ball parks, elaborate rice fields and quaint villages.

Learn how a little caterpillar can have a major effect on your plants. For those with a culinary interest, there is a soup I won't mention here, white bees with ginger and green slime fungus with vegetables: a feast for all your senses. Do not miss this great event!

A Lighter Mix for Epiphytes, Tuberous Plants, and Favorites

Andrew Norris

When I began my plant growing journey, at least 15 years ago, I spent lots of time combining different components, to make various plant collections happy. I grew epiphytes, bromeliads, orchids, and carnivorous plants, aquatic plants...you name it and I've grown it! I recently returned to my roots a bit, with my gesneriads growing. I will explain my methods and reasoning here.



I sought to seek an alternative to our normal soilless growing mix, for a few reasons. One reason was that plants seemed to decline, at around the same time frame, the mix itself starts to look unsightly. In wicking, this was often before the mix should have been tired and the plant was due to be repotted .



Sinningia douglasii tuber in the mix

Another reason is that I have a strong aversion to seeing the perlite, in quantity, at the top of my mix. This especially true, once the perlite is stained and forms a tarnished top dressing in my plant pots. This is unavoidable, because I top water my wicked

plants, before placing them on wicks. I do this for several weeks, until I am sure the plant roots are able to handle the constant presence of water. This reduces my losses and damaged crown, significantly. While top watering serves its purpose, it also results in the perlite floating to the top of the mix and is time consuming. If I could find a dark colored, cost effective, alternative to garish perlite, I would.



Sinningia 'Prudence Ridley' in the mix

An additional reason I decided a new approach was needed, is that I tend to root valued cutting in long fibered sphagnum moss. I find the moss promotes an environment less prone to rotting and is better able to support cuttings for a length of time, without loss. Interestingly, the plants, ones rooted, seem to cease growing, until potted in traditional mix and others seemed not to root, without the denser, potting mix enveloping the rooting end...the moss was too airy.



Columnnea gigantea cutting in the mix

There are many options for aggregates and additions to rooting and soil mixes, but I will only be discussing the components I used, here. My choice of media are working well and were largely dictated by what I had on hand and this translated in you being able to source the ingredients locally or through mail order and garner similar experiences. Before I discuss my alternative choice of media, I will mention that in the cases of tuberous *Sinningias*, *Primulina*, *Gesneria*, and other genera, known to appreciate lime, I add a bit of pelleted dolomite lime, to their mix only. The other genera do not have their mix amended, except they usually get a higher percentage of my usual soilless wicking mix, added.



Nemathanthus pycnophyllus in growing mix

My soilless, wicking mix consists of Sunshine Mix #4, with enough perlite added to create a mix of around 75-80% perlite. I also add 1 1/3 -2 cups of Holly Tone to 10 quarts of mix. The size perlite used is very important and while a mix of finer and coarser grades can be used to achieve the total percentage of perlite, in your wicking mix; I feel it is very important that at least 65% be a grade around the size of a large, plump, garden pea. If not, I find my mix gets too compact and the plants suffer.

For rhizomatous plants and plants that grow as epiphytes, as well as tuberous plants that enjoy slightly acid conditions, my amended mix is beneficial because it maintains the correct pH, allows air to reach the roots, resists break down, and holds fertilizer and moisture well. It also does not tend to exhibit the mobility of the perlite that the

soilless mix does and is not such an eyesore. I typically pot the following plants in this mix. *Chrysothemis*, *Sinningias* that do not form tubers or do not go dormant (Prudence Risley and *S.schiffnerii*), *Columnea* (especially the *Dalbergaria*, *Tricantha*, and *Pentadinia* types), and certainly *Kohlerias*, *Streptocarpus*, *Drymonia*, and other plants, would appreciate this mix as well.

The mix consist of about 2 parts long fibered sphagnum moss, chopped with scissors into inch long pieces, 2 parts my usual soilless mix, 2 parts Schultz's Orchid Mix, and 1 part Grade 4 perlite (about popcorn sized). I sometimes add leca stones for plants that are tall or need greater support, drainage, or as a layer in the pot bottom. I do this most often for



Variegated *Phalaenopsis*



Variegated *Phalaenopsis* leaves in mix

plants I am least likely to repot often. To chop the moss, I find it easiest to bunch a wad up, dry, in my hand and cut it with scissors, moving the blades about 1/2" down the bunch, with each cut. I mix the mix while dry, save for maybe a light squirt to keep the dust down. I top water potted plants to get them started and either wick them or continue to top water them. This mix lends itself well to either type of watering. For plants that enjoy lime, I cut my soilless mix component in half, to one part, and add about 2 teaspoons of pelleted lime per 5" pot. I like to pot my



Columnea orientandina in mix

tuberous *Sinningias*, *Gesneria*, and some *Primulina* in this mixture. I also tend to reduce the moss component and increase the amount of perlite for tubers, because they are less likely to rot during dormancy this way.

So far, I have noted the ease with which dormant rhizomes can be left in both mixes and occasionally top watered, until growth is resumed, without rotting.

The same is true for tuberous plants. I have also noted an improved appearance in plants I have moved to this mix, increased success in rooting some cuttings, in this mix, and a greatly improved appearance to my potting mix. I hope you will give this a try or try your hand at mixing your own, custom blend for your most special plants and have as much success as I have. Happy Growing

Bloomin' Now

Barb Stewart's plants



Sinningia TZ x PB (Texas Zebra x ?)

Bloomin' Now cont'



Barb's *Eucadonia* 'Adele'



Barb's *Eucadonia* – unidentified plant with smaller flowers & leaves than 'Adele', red hairs on the stems and back of leaves, but not as hairy as 'Adele'. It is very leggy and trailing off the plant shelf!



Hummingbird moth enjoying some Bee Balm



Species Streptocarpus

Program by Dee and Bob Stewart

October 26, 2013 NCAC Meeting

There are over 150 species of *Streptocarpus* known so far. They range from plants small enough to bloom in a thimble to plants with a single leaf over two feet long. The genus *Streptocarpus* has provided many beautiful, floriferous plants for our enjoyment. These plants have even become popular with the casual house plant grower under the moniker "Cape Primroses". Focusing on species of *Streptocarpus* subgenus *Streptocarpus*, this program will discuss their growth habit, culture and provide a glimpse at a number of the very desirable species.

Streptocarpus have a very unusual growth habit. Understanding how they grow will contribute to understanding how to grow them. This program will review what's unique about the way *Streptocarpus* species grow throughout their life-cycle. Given that background, we'll discuss how to grow these plants successfully, including how to grow them without pots - nature's way! Along the way, you'll see many of the species that make this genus so popular!

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 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.

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