



Petal Tones

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

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President's Message

A belated Happy New Year to all of you. Hard to believe it's the end of January as I write this. We still haven't had a "Winter". I was slow at bringing in my pots of hardy Sinningia in the Fall. In fact, I didn't really worry about the outside temperatures until January 2nd when I finally brought the pots indoors. If they were in the ground they probably would still be alright; however, growing in pots exposed to the surrounding air is a bit risky for the hardy plants.

We've got an exciting year coming up this year. This is supposed to be our break year from shows, but instead we're going to go a bit overboard and participate in a regional show collaborating with the local Delaware and Philadelphia chapters. I don't have the dates in front of me, but I believe we'll be entering our plants on Sept. 29 and showing on Sept. 30. This will be very much like the MAAVS event that has been going on with African Violets.

And of course, let's not forget the Gesneriad Society Convention in Seattle this year. I haven't been to Seattle in years, but the green-ness of the city still sticks in my mind. The Pacific Northwest has some fantastic growers, on both sides of the border with Canada, and we should see impressive quality, quantity and sheer numbers of Gesneriads!

This will be my first Convention as Convention Chair. I could use some support out there in Seattle. So far Ki is the only NCAC member that has registered. Come on people! It's going to be fun!

We've got some great programs lined up for the next few months, and I'm sure Brian will come up with some more before much longer. In February our own Barbara Stewart will be presenting the dish garden program that she was too sick to present at the September Show. March will be the propagation program that we haven't had for a while. This will be our chance to share cuttings and seedlings and some of the rare stuff that we've picked up at shows and outside meetings. Then in April Michael Riley, long-time grower and Past President of the Gesneriad Society, will be here to talk about his VERY SPECIAL way of growing plants in New York City.

So let's all plan on a great 2012! See you at the meeting.

Meeting Schedule:

Meetings will be located in the trailer at the National Arboretum unless noted.

Saturday, February 11th

Barb Stewart "Dish Gardens"

Door opens at 9:30am Meeting at 10:00am

Saturday, March 10th

Propagation and Plant Swap

Door opens at 9:30am Meeting at 10:00am

Saturday, April 14th

Michael Riley, "Epiphytes in the Concrete Jungle"

Door opens at 9:30am Meeting at 10:00am

Meeting dates for 2012

May 12th, Summer picnic, September 8th, October 13th, December 8th

Bloomin' Now

Barb's Amaryllis from the Christmas Event. This is the second stalk of bloom!



Bloomin' Now

Shared by Johanna



Simningia 'Carangola' grown by US Botanic Garden staff



Johanna's *Saintpaulia* 'Rob's Hallucination' 2 views



Bloomin' Now

Donna's basil



I threw a bunch of various basil seeds I pulled off of my summer plants into a pot on my counter. These babies grew perfectly under the light on my kitchen counter with some Chirita's I was keeping my eye on and a coleus cutting. Donna

Chapter Desperately Seeking

- Streptocarpus* 'Harlequin Blue'.....Brian Connor
- Streptocarpus* 'Rose Halo'.....Brian Connor
- Streptocarpus* 'Shenandoah Sugar Plum'.....Brian Connor
- Niphimenes* 'Lemonade'.....Brian Connor
- Henckelia malayana*.....Brian Connor
- Henckelia ANYTHING!...*.....Brian Connor
- Streptocarpus* 'Bristol's Goose Egg'.....Donna Beverin
- Begonia schmidtiana*.....Donna Beverin
- xAchimenantha* 'Dutch Treat'.....Donna Beverin
- Simningia* 'Li'l Georgie'Lee Stradley
- Chirita* 'Veracunda'.....Barry Woolf
- Kohleria warszewiczii*.....Barry Woolf



Brian's *Streptocarpus* 'Hot Time Tonight' MAAVS First place

History and Culture of the Streptocarpus

by Brian Connor

Commonly known as the Cape Primrose, *Streptocarpus* is actually a diverse genus of gesneriads, remarkable for its exquisite flowers and botanical oddity. Genetically, *Streptocarpus* is divided into two sub-genera, that are closely related to *Saintpaulia* (African Violets). Subgenus *Streptocarpella* (probably a separate genus – the "*Streptocarpus* with stems") is less well known but has a wider geographical range in Africa and Asia. This article will deal only with the subgenus *Streptocarpus*: stemless rosette type plants native to South Africa. In nature, *Streptocarpus* is found along shaded river banks and hillside cliffs. The plants grow from gaps in the earth and crevices filled with moss, soil and pebbles. Even when there is a source of constant moisture, the roots are kept cool and well aerated. This is a crucial point to consider for indoor culture. The seedpods of *Streptocarpus* are characteristically twisted (*Streptocarpus* translates from Latin as "twisted seedpod"). Seedlings sprout as dicots, but then something bizarre happens. One of the cotyledons (seed leaves) dies and the other becomes the true leaf.



© 2005 Kyoko Imai

For a few species such as *Streptocarpus dunnii* and *S. wendlandii*, this is the only leaf that is ever produced and it may grow 1 to 3 feet in length. These species are monocarpic and usually die after flowering.

Most species of *Streptocarpus* are perennials and produce multiple leaves after the single cotyledon in a stemless rosette.

Let me emphasize that most species and nearly all hybrids will not die after flowering.



© 2005 Kyoko Imai Unifoliate seedlings of *S. (polyanthus x prolixus)*.

Streptocarpus rexii (white, light blue to light purple flowers) was the first recognized species and the first to be cultivated around 1820. More species followed, including the red flowered *S. dunnii* in 1884. In the late 1880s, *S. rexii* was crossed with *S. dunnii*, *S. polyanthus* (white to blue-mauve flower with white to yellow throat) and *S. cyaneus* (white to blue flower with distinct lines in the throat). Their offspring gave rise to the *S. rexii* hybrids, with white, blue, purple, pink or

red flowers, often with a contrasting color or markings in the throat.



© Gustav Ciamaga
Wiesmoor hybrid *Streptocarpus*. Courtesy of <http://gesneriads.ca/>.

In the early 1950s, Fleischman introduced the Wiesmoor hybrids. The Wiesmoor hybrids were large plants with lovely flowers, 3 to 5 inches in diameter, often with ruffled edges. They were beautiful plants, but not easy to grow as houseplants and were often confused with (and mislabeled as) the *S. rexii* hybrids. Around this same time a little known hybrid in Great Britain was produced (with *S. johannis* as a parent) called 'Constant Nymph.' As it turned out, this hybrid was less showy than the Wiesmoors but was remarkably floriferous and flowered intermittently throughout the year. It wasn't until years later that horticulturists fully realized that 'Constant Nymph' was an important breakthrough in *Streptocarpus* hybridization.



© Ronald Myhr
S. johannis wall planting at Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland.
Courtesy of <http://gesneriads.ca/>.

Several other, very similar 'Nymphs' followed, all blue to purple flowered. Then the John Innes Institute began to extensively cross the Nymph series and *S. johannis* with other species and hybrids to create better, more floriferous plants in more vibrant colors. Plants such as 'Tina,' 'Fiona,' and 'Falling Stars' emerged in the 1970s and 80s and were marketed by Dibleys (<http://www.dibleys.com>).

The Dibleys became an important European hybridizer, introducing plants such as the lovely but ubiquitous 'Kim' and the Crystal series (using *S. kentaniensis* as a parent).



©2005 Kyoko Imai
S. 'Kim', shown at the 2006 NCAC Show.



©2008 Kyoko Imai
Hirsute leaves and buds of *S. kentaniensis*.



©2005 Van Swearingen  (Creative Commons license)
S. 'Falling Stars'.

Plants such as 'Crystal Ice' grew very narrow strap like leaves in a more symmetrical rosette (the *S. kentaniensis* influence) and they are extremely floriferous under low light conditions. In Great Britain, Germany and Japan, *Streptocarpus* continue to be actively hybridized.



©2006 Van Swearingen  (Creative Commons license)
S. 'Lavender Rosette', grown by Al Romero, GSNY. This is a hybrid by Dale Martens, registered in 1998.

Meanwhile, back in America, Jonathan Ford pioneered *Streptocarpus* hybridization and introduced such plants as 'Something Special' and the double 'Chorus Line.' Lyndon Lyon (<http://www.lyndonlyon.com>) and Rob's Violet Barn (the Bristol series, <http://www.violetbarn.com>) produced fantasy flowers such as 'Space Dust,' 'Bristol's Party Boy' and 'Bristol's Party Girl.'



©2007 Amy Ray
S. 'Bristol's Party Boy'.

Dale Martens ('Texas Hot Chili'), Lee Stradley (hybrids with *S. lilliputana*), Dennis Miller ('Neil's Strawberry') and others have produced an amazing array of innovative hybrids. However, the most prolific hybridizer in recent years has been David Thompson. He has burst onto the scene with 20-30 striking, free



©2008 Amy Ray S. 'Spin Art'.

flowering hybrids such as 'Purple Peppered,' 'Summer Parfait,' 'Spin Art,' 'Remembering John' and too many others to list. Two important trends in Streptocarpus hybridizing are variegated leaves and fragrant flowers. Plants such as 'Iced Pink Flamingo' and 'Iced Amethyst Showoff' have wonderful white and green variegated leaves. Offspring from crosses with *S. candidus* and *S. vandeleurii* may have scented flowers.



© Ronald Myhr
S. 'Crystal Ice', grown by Ronald Myhr. Courtesy of <http://gesneriads.ca/>.



S. Bristol's Goose Egg is fragrant, compact & very floriferous

History and Culture of Streptocarpus

Part II: Culture

For the most part, Streptocarpus culture is not terribly difficult. Most cultural problems begin with watering (especially wick watering) Streptocarpus and finding an appropriate soil mix.



© 2008 Kyoko Imai
Streptocarpus 'Iced Pink Flamingo,' 'Good Hope,' 'Spin Art,' 'Persian Carpet.'

LIGHT: Streptocarpus, like African violets, enjoy bright light but not many hours of direct sun. Of course, natural light can vary from window to window, depending on many factors. Usually, east and west-facing windows are the best because they tend to provide early morning/late\ afternoon sunlight. Plants may need to be placed several feet away from a southern exposure. Either 2-4 tube fluorescent fixtures give excellent results.

HUMIDITY: Moderate (30%), humidity doesn't need to be high for flowering

TEMPERATURE: Daytime temp of 65°-80° F and 55°-75° F nighttime temp is best. Temperatures above 85-90° F will cause some varieties to wilt.

WATERING: Here is a way Streptocarpus differ from AVs. Streptocarpus like to dry out more than AVs (surface dry, ¼

inch - dry) if you are watering by hand. If wick watering, use a MUCH lighter mix than for your AVs. I hate to admit it, but on rare occasions Streptocarpus have survived extreme wilting when plants have been “forgotten” or their wick has dried up or become dysfunctional.



© 2006 Kyoko Imai
Limp Streptocarpus (rexii x gardenii). Note how the leaves are so limp, they are hugging the pot.



© 2006 Kyoko Imai
The same Streptocarpus 36 hours after watering.

FEEDING: When wicking, I regularly use **half strength** (per label) 20/20/20 CONSTANTLY. I have used Miracle Gro Tomato (the pink powder) routinely. I have also used Schultz and Peters, AV fertilizers (half strength). And I add 2 tablespoons Hydrogen Peroxide per gallon of fertilizer to keep algae out of my wicking reservoirs. Once a month switch to a 12-36-14.

Lately I have been using some hydroponics type fertilizers that seem to work well.

If not wicking, feed at half strength at every watering or every 2 weeks at regular strength.

POTTING: Repot every 6 months to 1 year. Do not over-pot; under-potting is preferable.

SOIL MIX: If not wicking, a well draining AV mix with plenty of perlite will suffice (even the Cornell 1:1:1 mix). When wicking add extra coarse perlite, charcoal and diatomite, My wicking mix evolves and changes but it is 80-85% drainage material and very little “soil” (but that means regular fertilizing is necessary!).



Diatomite is a type of horticultural gravel composed of silica and is well known to orchid growers. Paradoxically, it provides drainage and aeration but absorbs water also. Diatomite comes in fine, small, medium and large grade. The fine grade looks like kitty litter and compacts too much (I think) for extensive use in my Strept Wicking mix. I am currently mixing the small with the medium grade diatomite. Also I insist on using coarse perlite in the wicking mix. This soil mix is an experiment in progress – so if you can improve it, please do so!

PROPAGATION: Seed, Division, Leaf Cuttings

Can propagate by seed which is very fine (1.8 million per ounce, according to Professor Moore)

Can also propagate by dividing multiple crowns

Leaf cuttings are the most rewarding method of propagation because you can get many offspring this way!

Cut leaf wedges or horizontal sections with the central rib removed. You can dust the cut side with rooting hormone powder if you choose

Bury the cut side of the leaf no more than ¼” in a well draining propagation mix

Like AVs, this process can take 2-4 months for babies to appear. Be patient!

Where each vein intersects the soil mix, a baby plant can potentially grow

Pot them up when they are large enough for you to handle



Streptocarpus 'Peachy Pink' baby, in Brian's mix.



© 2008 Kyoko Imai Streptocarpus leaf cuttings

• **GROW FOR SHOW:** Remove old flower stems as close to the leaves as possible. Trim (and shape) brown edges from leaves with pinking shears. This mimics the natural scalloped edges of Streptocarpus leaves, if done artfully. Disbud 9- 10 weeks before show and fertilize with 12-36-14 or another flower booster. About 4-5 weeks before show, stop disbudding and use 12-36-14 again. Streptocarpus are wonderful plants. There is more than one way to successfully grow a Strep! Try one!
Brian

Ask Mr. Gesneriad

Question:

I shared information from the latest issue of Gesneriads with folks in my violet club. The new names are given for a number of species. However, most of us are growing hybrids. How are they named? For example, Chirita sinensis is now Primulina dryas. What is Chirita sinensis "Hisako"? Is it now Primulina dryas "Hisako"?
Barbara

Answer:

Yes, Chirita sinensis 'Hisako' becomes Primulina dryas 'Hisako' (single quotes). Most hybrids are between two different species or a species and a hybrid and the species name is not needed to identify the hybrid. In the case of P. dryas 'Hisako' both parents were varieties of Primulina dryas so the species name is maintained.

Question:

I have a Hemiboea subcapitata that I was not brave enough to plant and leave out for the winter. Will it go dormant? If not, the foliage was damaged during one of the hurricanes; will the plant survive vigorous pruning in the spring?

Answer:

Hemiboea is a rhizomatous genus from S. China. It goes partly to mostly dormant over the dry winter season. If not forced into

dormancy it will send up additional stems when conditions improve in the Spring. When new growth pops up the old damaged stems can be cut back to the soil surface. The rhizomes in this genus can get quite large. I have personally dug rhizomes out of the garden that were 1 1/2 inches in diameter and over a foot long. Unlike the scaly rhizomes of new world Gesneriads, the old world rhizomes are smooth and look like underground stems with a few tiny leaves distributed along the length. Be brave this year. Plant at least part of the plant in some well-drained soil in the garden. The cold we get won't hurt them - it's pretty similar to their homeland. But excess moisture in the soil will drown them. The plants need to be dry when dormant.

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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