



# Petal Tones

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

Volume 40, number 4

April 2009

## Message from the President

Does it really feel like spring has arrived? I'm writing this on March 22, and while there's no snow out there, the weather just hasn't inspired me to go out and work in the garden. But that's a good thing in my case. If I spend all my time outdoors when do I work on getting my plants ready for Convention?

Yes, that big deal that we all enthusiastically volunteered for is only three months away. By now we should all have a pretty good idea of what we'll have for show. Now it's time to work on those plants: re-potting, grooming, clipping, shaping and trying to get them to look better than they ever have before. April 2 was technically the last day that you could buy plants for entry in the horticulture sections of the show, but plants for the artistic (arrangements) and the arts (landscapes, terrariums) sections can be bought right up until the day of the show. In fact, the plant sales room is open early for those who will be entering arrangements so that they can find that perfect flower or stem to finish off the look that they were trying to achieve.

I know that this group can grow some terrific looking plants. I hope that every one of you has at least one entry in the show. From what I'm seeing on gesneriphiles, there will be quite a few growers coming who have never been to a Convention before. I think our location will bring some terrific growers from all over the east coast. DC is an attraction for foreign growers too. But don't let the size of the Convention scare you away. Plants are judged on their own merits. Just knowing that you scored 95 points on a plant is rewarding, no matter what ribbon that ends up being.

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At the March meeting, rhizomes and tubers donated by Dave's Violets were on offer as a fundraiser.

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## **Upcoming Events and 2009 Meetings:**

### **Next Meeting: Saturday April 11, 2009**

10:30 – doors open

11:00 – program begins: **Growing in Leca Stones**

11:45-12:15 – Raffle and Little Show Entries

12:15-12:30 – Little Show (everyone should bring at least one plant for show every month)

12:30-1:00 – Socializing & Lunch

1:00-2:00 – Business Meeting

\*immediately followed by **Convention Show**

**Committee meeting** in Silver Spring

Meetings are at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. New members are welcome – please introduce yourself for a free plant.

### **Meetings in 2009:**

5/9/09 (propagation workshop)

6/13/09 (pre-Convention meeting)

6/30-7/4/09 – The Gesneriad Society Convention (location: Silver Spring, MD)

9/12/09, 10/10/09, 12/12/09

...cont. from page 1

This next meeting will be a replay of the talk I was going to give in January until the tractor in my garage decided to slice a big piece out of my shin. I'm going to show how I grow my plants in Leca stones. I know some of you have tried this method with varying degrees of success. I find that just about anything will grow in the stones, and for good reason — think of some of the photos I brought back from Brazil. Plants are growing on tree bark or stuck in a crack on a rocky cliff. Not exactly that 1-1-1 mix we're all using, is it?

I like to think of Leca culture like growing a cutting in a narrow mouthed container half filled with water. The bottom of the cutting gets "water roots" and the part above the water gets "air roots" in the high humidity atmosphere. The air roots in Leca culture occupy the spaces between the stones above the water level. Plants can't rot in Leca because they get lots of air around the roots. Even plants like *Streptocarpus*, *Petrocosmea* and *Chirita* which can't stand wet soil mixes do well. I think I've said this before, but I even grow succulents and cactus sitting in trays of water. It's all a matter of finding the right level of water.

But stones aren't for everyone. I'd like you all to share your growing medium recipe with us for the May issue. I mentioned the standby "Cornell Mix" of 1 part sphagnum, 1 part perlite and 1 part vermiculite. Does anyone use that exact mix? How do you modify it? Where do you buy coarse perlite and vermiculite (not the powdery stuff you can get at Home Depot)? What else do you add to the mix? In May we're going to be holding a propagation workshop and I doubt we'll be using Leca for that. We'll need some soil-less mixes, pots, plant labels, and a willingness to get a little dirty while having fun. But I'm getting ahead of myself. See you at the April meeting!

Jim



*Magnolia x soulangiana*

## April Program: Growing in Leca Stones

This program will be about how I grow gesneriads and other plants in Leca stones, a hard fired clay pellet made in Germany. The method is often referred to as semi-hydroponic since there is no flowing water circulating air and water around the plants. The plants are only half or a third submerged in water and get their required air from the spaces between the stones.

I'll show how to start cuttings in Leca, how to transplant an established plant into Leca, and how to repot something that has been growing in Leca for a while. Rhizomes, tubers and fibrous-rooted plants; I haven't found a gesneriad yet that won't grow in Leca. If you'd like to try Leca with a plant of your own, bring it in and we'll get it started.

Jim

*\*Also see Jim's article in the **January** issue of Petal Tones.*



Spring in the DC area



A carpet of *Anemone blanda* 'Blue Shades' at Green Spring Gardens, a Fairfax County park in Alexandria, Virginia.

## **I Realize I'm Hooked Because . . .**

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- ...I return home with more plants than I took to the sales table.
- ...I constantly "underpot" in order to get more plants on my shelf.
- ...I start cuttings for the sales table but mostly they remain on my shelves.
- ...I reset plants that become rangy but I retain the mother plant.
- ...I may have two dozen healthy seedlings of one species, but I keep all the weaklings hoping they'll gain strength.
- ...I put off buying that special article and use the money to buy new introductions.
- ...I subscribe to every magazine that mentions "Gesneriads".
- ...I recognize flower and plants whose names I cannot pronounce.
- ...Latin suddenly becomes a 'live' language.
- ...I fly into a rage when I hear the wrong information being dispensed by a radio plant show host.
- ...Ahead I see a sign and discover, after I drive in, that it reads 'geraniums' not gesneriads.
- ...I find the time to visit all the nurseries in the vicinity but cannot find time to visit the optician.
- ...I buy plants for which I have no room.
- ...I make a list in order to keep track of my plants.
- ...I find, hidden behind the dalbergaria, a blooming miniature which is not included on the list.
- ...I overhear someone talking about a 'strep throat' and I wonder what colour the flower is.
- ...Someone refers to a Boa Constrictor and I immediately ask for a cutting.
- ...I go to an orchid show and I am disappointed because there are no gesneriads on the sales table.
- ...I have a habit of engineering all my conversations to include gesneriads in the hope of involving the other party.

- ...I support the notion that the Society should meet twice monthly instead of just the 2nd Sunday of each month.
- ...I have recurring dreams of unusual hybrids being produced in my basement.
- ...I am elated when we gain a new member but equally resentful when one is lost.
- ...I can hardly wait for the next AGGS Convention.
- ...I hear the weatherman refer to humidity and air velocity and immediately think of my plant room.
- ...On my shelf I have every fertilizer, insecticide and fungicide that has been on the mark.
- ...I leap out of bed at 5:30 a.m. and rush to the plant room to ensure my Eucodonia is not being devoured by 'mealybugs' – it was only a nightmare!
- ...I get 'jitters' when a smoking visitor puffs clouds of contaminated air in the direction of my plant shelves.
- ...Someone tells me I am 'addicted'; I deny it and reply "It's just my hobby".

### **Competition!**

**Feeling addicted? Write it down, send it to *Petal Tones* - I'll include them anonymously in the May issue. The best one by vote entitles you to your choice of raffle plant at the May meeting!**

**....and don't forget to send in your potting mix recipes too:**

***3 cups peat  
1 cup sponge rock  
2 tablespoons coco powder  
Bake at 220F for 3 hours.....***

## **Announcements**

The Gesneriad Research Center at the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens is pleased to announce

### **World Gesneriad Research Conference 2010**

WGRC 2010 will be a three-day scientific meeting to be held in Sarasota, Florida in September or October 2010 focused on research in Gesneriaceae. Experts and students are invited to make presentations about research on Gesneriaceae and to discuss, promote and plan for continued research-based advancements in this important plant family. Plant enthusiasts and horticulturalists will also be encouraged to attend the presentations and to participate in discussion groups. Associated activities such as field trips will be a major part of WGRC 2010; these activities will be open to all conference attendees.

We are soliciting ideas and proposals for activities at WGRC 2010. Possible topics of interest include systematics, biogeography and ancestral range history, taxonomy and monography, pollination biology and ecology, conservation, horticulture, etc.

#### **STEERING COMMITTEE**

John L. Clark, University of Alabama  
John R. Clark, Gesneriad Research Center  
Eric H. Roalson, Washington State University  
Laurence E. Skog, Smithsonian Institution  
Bruce K. Holst, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens  
Jeanne Katzenstein, The Gesneriad Society, Inc.  
Melissa McDowell, Suncoast Chapter, The Gesneriad Society, Inc.  
Peter Shalit, The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

#### **TO PARTICIPATE**

To participate and/or to receive additional information please send an email to the Committee Chair, John R. Clark, at [gesneriadresearch@gmail.com](mailto:gesneriadresearch@gmail.com) by 15 April 2009 with the following information:

- Name, Institution, mailing and email address, current position.
- Research Interests.
- Symposia concept(s).
- How you wish to participate (poster, oral presentation, symposium chair, other).

- Which month you prefer the conference to be held (September or October 2010).
- Potential conflicts that should be considered (e.g., other meetings).

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### **Baltimore African Violet Club Mother's Day Show & Sale**

Location: Harford Mall  
Address: Bel Air Road, Bel Air, MD 21014 USA  
Event Date: 5/08/2009 - 5/09/2009  
Time: Fri 10 am to 9:30 pm Sat 10 am to 9:30 pm

#### **Event Description:**

AVSA judged Mother's Day Show & Sale. Hundreds of beautiful African violets, other gesneriads and exotic houseplants will be offered for sale. The sale will also feature leaves, cuttings, and many growing supplies including soil mix, plant rings, self-watering pots and much more. Experienced growers will be there to answer your growing questions. This event is free to the public.

#### **Whom to contact:**

Karen Foster [fancypos194@aol.com](mailto:fancypos194@aol.com) 410-457-4434  
Diane Richardson [mdianerichardson@peoplepc.com](mailto:mdianerichardson@peoplepc.com)  
410-686-4667

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### **Brazil Plants**

NCAC expects to be renewing its membership to the Brazil Plants Group for 2009. Up for discussion is the manner in which seeds will be distributed and, of course, a volunteer to handle the seed requests. See [brazilplants.com](http://brazilplants.com) for an idea of the seed list.

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### **Long Island Chapter May Meeting**

Jim Roberts will be serving as a judge at the Long Island Chapter's show on May 2. If you're interested in joining him for the day trip, please get in touch with Jim.

## My Trip to Brazil (Part II): Mauro's Place

by Jim Roberts

We all think of Mauro's Brazil Plants when it comes to gesneriads. His selection of gesneriad seeds from both old favorites and new collections is invaluable to growers around the world. But one of the first things you realize when you visit Mauro is that he is not just into gesneriads. Like many of us, he grows many different plant families. However, few of us grow the diversity that he maintains in his greenhouse and in garden beds around the yard.



Mauro in his greenhouse

Approaching the door to the greenhouse, the first thing I noticed was a garden filled with *Sarracenia* (pitcher plants), and then just before opening the door, a *Nepenthes* (vining, tropical pitcher) greets you on the outside of the screen where it has managed to work its way through the tiny openings. What's with all the pitchers? Well, I've been there a few times before so I wasn't surprised, but someone new to the experience might think he's at the wrong place.



*Streptocarpus* 'Joker'



Hanging pots of *Sinningia* etc.

That feeling changes as soon as you open the door. There's a large bed of *Streptocarpus* 'Joker' under the first tier of hanging pots just inside the door, and to the left are some enormous *Sinningia* tubers growing in the ground. The greenhouse is packed! And not just with gesneriads. Mauro is involved with and works closely with many different plant families. He makes his living leading plant collecting and observing tours for various groups around the world. Gesneriads seem to be a special interest, but I can't see him giving up anything else to make room for more of them. With his unique way of growing plants, there's always room for more.



*S. macrostachya* (top) and *S. reitzii* (bottom).

Any plant that gets large enough for at least a 6" clay pot is hung up in the greenhouse. I never asked why he does this, but I suspect it helps keep down ant infestations in the pots and also provides for the perfect drainage that these plants need. Orchids, Bromeliads, Passiflora, Aroids, Begonia; they all grow in pots suspended by wire from the roof of the greenhouse. This makes it a bit tricky to take pictures of some of them because you can't just take the plant off a shelf and position it nicely in front of a screen. You have to push pots aside and squeeze in between them with the camera lens in order to get the shot.

Yes, he does have some benches in the greenhouse for small growing plants (for e.g., *Sinningia pusilla* and *S. concinna*) and seedlings. But most are either suspended or growing in pots on the ground or growing in the ground. Some of the *Sinningia* tubers would require a 30" pot to contain them; the ground is so much easier.

I doubt that there are any *Nematanthus*, *Sinningia* or *Codonanthe* species found in Brazil that Mauro doesn't have growing. If he doesn't have it, it's because it hasn't been discovered yet. He works closely with Alain Chautems from Geneva in identifying and/or naming new species.

He does the same with other plant families. While I was there, Mauro told me about a graduate student finishing up his thesis on *Neomarica* (walking iris). He just wanted to see the plants that Mauro was growing of this genus and found 4-6 new, unidentified species growing there. Mauro collects what he thinks is new and interesting to him. Turns out that in this case it caused the grad. student to have to do a lot more work on his thesis.

Ki has photos from my talk of some of the various plants in the greenhouse. There were too many to try to describe here but if you have specific questions about any of them you can e-mail me at [jim-roberts@hughes.net](mailto:jim-roberts@hughes.net).

One thing I neglected to mention above. I am calling this a greenhouse even though the walls are mostly just screening. He has one small greenhouse attached to the main growing area that has a door. This area has solid walls, but not to keep in humidity like we would want to do here. It's mainly to keep in

the heat at night during their winter. I've been at his house in July when he had to scrape ice off the windshield of his jeep before we could drive it. That may be an exception to how cold it gets there, but those temperatures didn't seem to have any negative effect on the plants in the house. The roof over the growing area prevents frost from settling on the plants. During the summer months the temperatures are often well over 90 degrees and the humidity is 70% or higher. Yet the *Streps* grow and flower beautifully, and even the *Chirita* and *Petrocosmea* do well. So it would seem that as long as the air circulation is good and the humidity is high enough, these plants will survive and thrive anywhere.

Just one last word about his outside gardens. He grows most of his own coffee, and has dozens of varieties of *Passiflora* that he grows both for the ornamental value and for the passion fruits. He has stick tepees in the yard which can actually be seen on Google Maps. Just type -23 40.027 -46 8.047 into the search block and you'll end up on the beige colored roof of Mauro's house. From there you can see the large white area to the left (the greenhouse) and north of that is the area with the tepees. These tepees are covered with either *Passiflora* or *Aristolochia*.

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*Captions for photographs on following pages:*

1. *Gloxinia erinoides*
2. *Seemannia gymnostoma*
3. *Kohleria bogotensis*
4. *Columnea* species
5. *Drymonia strigosa*
6. *Sinningia allagophylla* orange version
7. *Seemannia nematanthoides*
8. *Codonanthe devosiana* berries
9. *Nematanthus australis*
10. *Nematanthus australis*
11. *Nematanthus bradei*
12. *Neomortonia nummularia*
13. *Nematanthus striatus*
14. *Sinningia braziliensis*
15. *Nematanthus corticola* seeds
16. *Nematanthus tessmannii* seeds being dispersed by ants
17. *Seemannia purpurescens* from Hans Wiehler - possibly a natural hybrid
18. *Nematanthus australis* seeds
19. *Sinningia richii*
20. *Diastema* aff. *racimeferum*
21. *Sinningia eumorpha* x *Sinningia* sp. Florianopolis
22. New *Sinningia* sp.
23. *Sinningia eumorpha* x *Sinningia* sp. Santa Teresa
24. *Streptocarpus kirkii*



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*Columnnea gloriosa*



*Sinningia* sp. Florianopolis at Mauro's.



*Sinningia pusilla*, grown by Al Pickrel

## National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

A chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.

[www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org](http://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.

The Gesneriad Society website: [www.gesneriadsociety.org](http://www.gesneriadsociety.org)  
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