



Petal Tones

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

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January 2009

Message from the President

First off I want to wish everyone a very happy new year! I hope you all included plants (care of, adding to your collection, growing and showing) in your resolutions for the year.

I also want to thank everyone for having the confidence in me to vote me into office. This is going to be a huge year for the club, and thanks to all the great work done by Carol at bringing some life and membership back to the club I think we'll do just fine. In the past two years I've seen the attendance at meetings at least double what it was when I joined the club just 2 ½ years ago. We've been able to attract some great speakers and have had some fantastic monthly programs. Carol may be smaller than I am, but I'm going to have a heck of a time filling her shoes. Thank You Carol!!

If you were at the meeting in December you heard that we are going to have monthly meetings for at least the first half of the year so that we can better prepare ourselves for Convention. We'll try to concentrate on programs that will help us all gain some confidence in our methods and not be afraid to enter plants in the show. We've all seen some beautiful plants brought in for display that would have easily won ribbons in any show. However, some of the growers who brought them in have never entered our Chapter shows. Entering is not about winning. It's about showing others the beauty and potential of this very diverse family of plants. And a plant that's new or rarely seen, or a plant that's huge and magnificent is worth showing, even if it does have some marks on the leaves that could prevent it from getting a blue ribbon. The public, and that includes everyone attending the Convention as well as those who are just visiting to see the show, want to see these plants. Consider the show an Educational Display. Ribbons are just an added bonus if you happen to win some. *...cont.*



Raffle Table at the December Holiday Party

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Upcoming Events and 2009 Meetings:

Next Meeting: Saturday January 10, 2009

Program: Growing in Leca Stones

10:30 – doors open

11:00 – program begins

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

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

Meetings in 2009:

2/14/09, 3/14/09, 4/11/09, 5/9/09

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

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By now most of you have heard about my goal to enter a plant in every class at Convention. I'm keeping with that goal but it's going to be a real challenge. Before I started growing Gesneriads in earnest again I had very few plants and they all went outside for the summer. It turns out that was probably what kept them all alive. I have a whole house water filter/softener that adds salt to the water to replace the iron and other minerals that made the house water smell bad and stain all the while tile and porcelain when we first moved in. In small doses, over a few winter months, that didn't really harm any of the plants, and the residual salt would get flushed out when the plants went out for the summer.

However, once I put up light stands and put everything on wicks I started seeing problems about 6 – 9 months later. Wicks were drying up and refusing to soak up water, plants were showing lots of browning on the leaf edges, and whole plants would just shrivel up over time. Salt and gesneriads just don't go together well (except maybe in a salad). My Christmas gift this year was a new water line that bypasses the filter and softener, so that the plants get the full benefit of the iron and minerals in the water instead of getting their roots burned off. The water line includes a small water heater so that I can control the temperature of the water. But the bottom line is that I have just under 6 months left to get all the plants growing again and replace plants that I've lost so that I can have an entry for every Class.

When Gesneriads are growing well most can form a good show plant in that time. I actually have until April 2 to acquire plants, since the rules of the show state that the plants have to be in your possession for 3 months prior to the show. I'll be keeping an eye on Lowe's and Home Depot for some of the large potted Columnea, Aeschynanthus and Nematanthus. My Best in Show at the Chapter Show last Spring was Columnea 'Broget Stavanger,' a plant I bought at Home Depot the previous Fall.

I really look forward to the next few months as we all get ourselves ready. In addition to the monthly Chapter meetings I plan to hold meetings in February, April and June for the Show Committee Chairs. We can decide on locations at the January

meeting. I'm also going to re-institute the Little Show program. Right now I'm the only judge in the group, so judging a show is a bit difficult. However, Ben Paternoster, Judges' Chair for the Gesneriad Society, has put me back up to my previous status as a Master Judge. Instead of having secretive judging of show plants we'll take 15 minutes as a group and review plants brought for the Little Show. I'll discuss what's good about the plants, what could have been improved, and give the plants a rough point score (blue, red or yellow range).

I think I've rambled on long enough. I look forward to the continued growth of the Chapter and a fun two years as President.

JR



January Program: Growing in Leca Stones

by Jim Roberts

I'm still in the process of converting my collection over to Leca Stones. Back when Barbara and I had our business we grew everything in Leca, and I do mean everything. We even had some cactus (the spiny, barrel type) growing in the same trays as the Episcia. Stones were on the brown bag gift table at the Holiday Party in December. Some of you have tried the stones with mixed results, so I thought I'd fill you in on my experiences and tricks. Bring a plant or some cuttings if you'd like and we'll pot them up in the stones so that you can try this method at home. They work with tubers and rhizomes too, so any plant you want to try is acceptable.

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If you missed the August 2008 issue of Petal Tones, it's available on our website. It includes Jim's article on growing in leca.

Some Important Notes

2009 Convention Information

Yes, the program, show schedule, and everything else you need to know is up on The Gesneriad Society's website! And yes, you can register now, online, just like that. For info, visit: <http://gesneriadsociety.org/>

Membership Dues

Our Treasurer reminds us that it's time for membership dues. If you haven't paid your 2009 dues, please do so at the next meeting or contact Larry Skog.

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Our Meeting Place Is Safe—For Now

by Aarti Shah

As you may have heard, in April of 2008 the U.S. National Arboretum's parent agency—the Agricultural Research Service—called for a \$2 million cut in the Arboretum's budget. This proposed cut was part of an \$84 million cut proposed for the Agricultural Research Service, the scientific research arm of the Department of Agriculture, which would have led to the closing of the 11 research centers across the country and cutbacks at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville.



Pyracantha 'Navaho', a US National Arboretum introduction, 1978. Photographed at the National Arboretum on the day of the December meeting.



Capsicum annuum 'Black Pearl', an ornamental pepper. A product of a Collaborative Research and Development Agreement between the Agricultural Research Service and Pan America Seed Company. All-America Selections award winner, 2006. Photographed September 2007 at the National Arboretum.

The proposed cut in the Arboretum budget would have reduced funding for the Arboretum's public programming and care of plant displays and collections by 60 percent.¹ The Arboretum Director Thomas Elias prepared a plan that would cut 20 positions from a staff of 76, and remove some plant collections. Most significantly for our group, this proposal also would have closed the Arboretum on weekends. According to Friends of the National Arboretum (fona.org), a largely volunteer support group that has tried to raise public awareness of the proposed cuts, the cut might also have resulted in the closure of part of the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum.² (This museum was featured in a previous edition of *Petal Tones*.)

Happily, on September 27, 2008, Congress came to the rescue, giving final approval for funding the Agricultural Research Service at last year's levels until March 6, 2009. Therefore, the issue of the proposed cuts should be tabled, at least until early 2009. So, our meeting place is safe—for a couple of months anyway.

¹ Adrian Higgins, An Infusion for a Wilting Institution, *Washington Post*, October 3, 2008, at B02.

² Adrian Higgins, Plans Wilt at National Arboretum, *Washington Post*, April 26, 2008, at A01.

Bev's Gesneriad History – A Beginner's Story

by Beverly Nissenbaum

I consider myself a beginner level hobbyist. I started with one African violet given to me by my Mother; a familiar story I am told. Mom grew it from a leaf in dirt from the back yard in good old Brooklyn, NY. Mom had earlier showed me the leaf growing and said it took a whole year to grow from leaf to full size plant. The original plant, as with many of my Mom's violets, was grown from leaves that Mom would get from her sister in Seattle, probably in the 1970s – little leaves travelling in suitcases on Northwest Airlines through the years of visits to a city that was Mom's birth town. I was already decades into adulthood, but my Mom and Aunt were aging. I was interested in a way I had not been before.



This is Sally, The Best Dog Ever.

My Mom was groovy with earthy stuff. When I was a kid my Mom sliced off the top of a carrot and we grew it together in water in a saucer on a window sill. There were always lots of plants in my parent's house; behind chairs, on stairwell windows, in the bathrooms, and on the kitchen sink window ledge that faced east where at least a dozen African violets grew along with hanging plants. And when we traveled, we always visited the local botanical gardens.

I had never kept plants on my own until that one plant that Mom gave me about 10 years ago. I tended to it with utmost care. I started reading up on African violets, googling sites, and subscribing to the African Violet Society of America's monthly magazine. I kept that one lone plant on a west facing kitchen window sill for several years. My second plant was a hanging generic *Nematantus* bought from a local nursery; the journey goes on from there. I am partial to *Nematanthus*, but don't have the room to grow these well.



Saintpaulia 'Milang Lake'

I grow most of my plants on a six foot plant stand – four shelves, each with two 24 inch bulbs. I mostly use two cool white bulbs per shelf; but I often randomly mix in with full and wide spectrum. I am not a competitive hobbyist, but perhaps I will get that bug. I grow what grows well on those shelves and toss those that don't. I buy plants and supplies from a local nursery, Johnsons, and on rare occasions though the mail – Lyndon Lyons, Optimara, Logees. I now happily get plants from our club meetings. CVS sells a generic brand of small, clear plastic Dixie cups that I buy and drill holes in, and they also carry nylon string that I use for wicking, sometimes doubling the string. I write with indelible marker right on the pot, name, date potted.



I don't have a lot of room and I don't have a consistent system. I do make my own potting mix, with 1/3, peat, perlite and vermiculite; and use a liquid fertilizer on a regular basis – mostly Schultz's African Violet, 8-14-9, and sometimes Miracle Gro African Violet, 7-7-7, or the regular Miracle Gro. I wick some on food containers.



Shelf with bagged plants and Suzy, my gesneriad guardian.



Aeschynanthus sp. 'Pink Thai' and 'Red Thai'

I bag a lot. I often find that plants that do really well bagged, dry out and die when I shelve them on their own, especially in the winter – my stand is next to a radiator. In addition to the stand, I grow a few Strels and other plants and a hanging *Nematanthus* on a west facing window in the kitchen.



Closeup: Episcia Leaves

by Kyoko Imai

This month I took my macro lens to a couple of *Episcia* leaves. It's amazing just how hairy these leaves are - although to the naked eye, they're nothing compared to new leaves of *Sinningia leucotricha*.

The first photograph is of a blue-flowered *Episcia*, possibly *lilacina*. I find these blue-flowered ones struggle during most of the year, except for a few weeks in the spring and fall when temperatures are steadily around 80-85F. (Culture suggestions would be welcome.) This one is currently in the bottom of a growing case, and just received some "rain".



My stand is in the dining room right next to the table where I use my laptop, so I get to enjoy my plants almost every day up close. I recently read an article in AV magazine on the affects of fluorescent lights on your skin – it darkens it over time. The article didn't address cancer, just skin pigment, but I will look into this and perhaps adjust where I sit.



This next one is of new growth on *Episcia* 'La Solidar Bronze', from our club sale. It's currently growing in a plastic tub with various other cuttings.



Saintpaulia 'Kimono'

That's my plant hobby history. I am happy to share it with those who find it of interest. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Beverly Nissenbaum
Washington, DC
January 2009



***** Wish Lists *****

Jim Roberts:

- Any Gasteranthus*
- Streptocarpus rimicola*
- Petrocosmea formosa*

John Boggan:

- Seemannia* (formerly *Gloxinia*) *gymnostoma*

Brian Connor:

- Streptocarpus* 'Roulette Cherry'
- Streptocarpus* 'Roulette Azur'
- Smithiantha* 'Sassy Redhead'
- Smithiantha zebrina*
- Smithiantha* 'Big Dots Rule'
- Eucodonia* 'Adele'
- Eucodonia* 'Frances'

Carol Gates:

- Streptocarpus pole-evansii*
- Streptocarpus micranthus*
- Streptocarpus liliputana*
- Streptocarpus* 'Silky Touch'
- Chirita dielsii*



Verticillata 'Red Sprite', in front of the Administrative Building at the National Arboretum. Photographed December 2008 on the day of our meeting.

National Capital Area Chapter (NCAC)

A chapter of the Gesneriad Society, Inc.
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 adopt a free plant.

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NCAC website: www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

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