



Petal Tones

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

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings,

I hope everyone has enjoyed the summer break and is ready to begin meetings at the Arboretum again. We have a couple of great speakers lined up for the September and November meetings. As we commence our fall meeting schedule I'd like to encourage everyone to enter plants and designs in the Little Show competition. Please see back issues of Petal Tones for details on the Little Show (back issues now available on line on our new website). Remember that we will be having a show in the spring of next year. It's not too early to begin thinking about potential plant entries. Plant shows are one of the best ways to re-ignite and bolster a passion for this family of plants we call gesneriads. For the past couple of years we have had a limited number of individuals bring most of the show plants. I'm hoping we can break out of this routine with our spring show, as we have a number of new enthusiastic club members. A truly great show requires the participation of many people as this often leads to greater plant diversity. Entering a plant in the Little Show is a great way, if you've never entered a plant in a show before, to get an idea of how your plant will be judged. Gesneriad shows are competitively judged (as well, the Little show), as opposed to merit judging. This means that only one plant in each show category is eligible for each ribbon, blue, red, etc. A plant must also score 90 points or higher to get a blue, 80 or higher to get a red, and 70 or higher to get a white ribbon. Judges are looking for specific qualities such as the condition of the plant, which includes things like grooming to remove those pet hairs and traces of pesticide residue, trimming of leaves to remove brown edges, and removal of faded blooms. Plants are also judged for their culture which is a measure of how well the plant has been grown; are the leaves a vibrant green, or maybe pale from a nutrient deficiency. Does the plant have a pleasing shape, or is it leaning or leggy, suggesting that it may not have had enough light? Gesneriad shows allow staking of plants, the less obvious the better. One of the hardest things to control, that is also a point of judging, is the bloom count. With the exception of Saintpaulia, most gesneriads cannot be easily manipulated to bloom on schedule for a particular event. Many gesneriads bloom when they have reached a certain level of maturity (provided they have adequate light and cultural conditions), while others are seasonal and only bloom in spring or fall. This is the primary reason our club has chosen to alternate our shows from spring to fall each year. A plant that is just beginning to bloom and shows buds with color will often score better than one that is at the end of its blooming cycle. If you have the space, you can grow two plants of the same species, as one will often be slightly ahead of the other for its peak bloom time. For the shows, judging is done by panels of

three judges for each plant. For our Little Show, although we have certified judges in the club, we try to get the guest speakers to judge our shows, if possible for a non-biased view point. We also try to give the high lights of the Little Show judging, stating what qualities of the plant generated the score. This way everyone has the chance to learn what is valued in a particular gesneriad species. I hope you've got your eye on a plant or two that you may be able to bring to the September meeting.

Cheers, Carol Hamelink

LITTLE SHOW

Chairman – Jim Roberts

Section I – Gesneriads in Flower

- Class 1 – Tuberous
- Class 2 – Rhizomatous
- Class 3 – New World Fibrous-rooted
- Class 4 - Old World Fibrous-rooted
- Class 5 – Saintpaulia

Section II – Gesneriads Grown for Foliage

- Class 6 – Episcia
- Class 7 – all other New World
- Class 8 – Chirita and Petrocosmea
- Class 9 – all other Old World

- Section III – Other Horticultural Entries
- Class 10 – New Hybrids or Species
- Class 11 – Rarely Seen Hybrids or Species

Section IV – Artistic and the Arts

Class 12: Dish Garden or Natural Planting – These are not the same thing. A dish garden should be artistically balanced with a good selection of harmonious plant materials. Gesneriads MUST predominate. A Natural Planting is an artistic planting of one or more plants in a natural material (rock, driftwood, or other material). Only one entry of each type per exhibitor, but each exhibitor can have one dish garden and one natural planting.

Class 13: Terrarium – straight sided

Class 14: Terrarium – curved sided

Class 15: Photography – a print, no larger than 8 x 10", appropriately framed or displayed. If we get enough photos we'll subdivide the class to match the new TGS classes: plant close-up, whole plant, and plant photographed in nature. Only one entry per exhibitor, unless they fall into different classes of the three categories mentioned here.

Let's all pretend it's our Annual Show instead of "just" a "Little Show." We all need to practice for next March.

Karyn will help judge the show; let's give her a good workout.



Jim Roberts, NCAC/TGS Vice President

SHOPPING FOR GESNERIADS AT HOME DEPOT Jim Roberts

I don't know how often most of you go into the Home Depot or Wal-Mart or other big box stores looking for plants. I live out in the middle of nowhere and have to take what I can get. What I've gotten lately are four great *Columnea* at the Home Depot. Unfortunately, the Home Depot, or more specifically "Angel Plants" is not very good at labeling plants correctly, so after buying them I had to do a little research to get proper ID's.

Three of the plants are variegated varieties. Something that you don't see very often and which you might expect to pay \$6-10 for a small 4 inch pot with a rooted cutting or two over the internet or from a gesneriad supplier. At Home Depot these three varieties were \$14.00 each and were in 10" pots. Very full 10" pots.

Following are pictures and the proper names of the plants. Pictures of them in flower can be found on www.gesneriads.ca.

This beauty below is called *Columnea* 'Broget Stavanger'. Broget means variegated in Norwegian and Stavanger is the name of a town in Norway. It has been grown and distributed under the names of *Columnea* 'Tricolor' and *Columnea* 'Maarsan's Flame', but the 'Broget Stavanger' name is the one found in the registry and is the official name. Home Depot was selling it as *Columnea microphylla* 'Variegata.' The culture tag lists it as coming from the Himalayas!

The plant will trail for many feet and is spectacular when in flower. The large orange/red flowers are great in contrast to the green and white leaves. But the best part is that the plant is decorative even when not in flower, and really lights up an area with the bright markings on the leaves.

This plant likes a cool period over the Winter months to set bud, and since Angel Plants is located in Florida it probably won't flower for me this Summer. However, if I

can find the right location for it, it should look spectacular at our show in March next year.



Columnea 'Broget Stavanger'

This next plant has similar green and white variegation and was also sold under the name *Columnea microphylla* 'Variegata.' However, this one has much larger leaves and red hairy stems. The correct name for this one is *Columnea hirta* 'Light Prince.' My plant is in bud and even the calyxes have the green and white stripes.



Columnea 'Light Prince' calyxes

This next one is something that I was completely unfamiliar with. It was labeled; you guessed it, *Columnea microphylla* 'Variegata.' Unlike the other two, this one had a fantastic gold marking in the center of each leaf. *Columnea* 'Cascading Beauty' has glossier, more rounded leaves than the other two, but is just as showy.



Columnnea 'Cascading Beauty'



Close-up of Cascading Beauty' leaves

This last one is not variegated but is still a nice plant. It was labeled *Aeschynanthus Krakau*. It is more of an upright or sprawling plant than the three variegates but is one of those plants that can flower year round and puts on a great show under lights where it fits a lot easier than the baskets above. Of course, it isn't an *Aeschynanthus* from the Himalayas. The correct name is *Columnnea 'Krakatau.'*



Columnnea 'Krakatau'

When I bought it, it had been chopped off at the top and had no signs of what it's potential was going to be. I recognized the plant as a *Columnnea*, and from the old days of my business I knew that there was a *Columnnea 'Krakatau.'* It was nice to see the flowers pop out and verify my identification.

In conclusion, look for gesneriads everywhere. You'll find them in the strangest places. Just last week I stopped at this roadside flower stand/greenhouse on Liberty Road. I was just stopping to see what they had left for annuals when I ran across *Streptocarpus 'Black Panther'*, *Streptocarpus 'Concord Blue'* and *Streptocarpus 'Blue Angel'* all in full flower. Just sitting there in a tray with other exotics. \$5.99 each. I like a good steal.



Simningia 'Dollbaby' is a good container plant, even if the editor is a bad designer! Karyn – Please help!

SEPTEMBER MEETING AGENDA

A special welcome to our guest speaker **Karyn Cichocki** who will be giving a talk about Container Gardens – her program will go over the elements of design that are involved in creating a dish, natural and terrarium planting. Among topics she will discuss with us will be containers, plant material that can and also that should be avoided. She will also share her experience with growing on for show, as well as judging points.

Members are welcome to bring a container or terrarium and some plant material and Karyn will be happy to demonstrate how to plant it.

Welcome: 10:30 AM
Container Gardens: by Karyn Cichocki 10:35
Refreshments: 15-20 minutes- please use this time to complete your design and horticultural entries for the Little Show

FUTURE PROGRAM TOPICS

Please go over the list and send the editor what topics in the following list are of interest to you (mzukaitis@msn.com).

- Trained Gesneriads (bonsai, sculpted)
- Natural Plantings
- Hanging plants (growing large epiphytes well)
- Terrarium plants (high humidity, small growing plants)
- Saintpaulia species
- Any specific genus – you name it for us:
- Alternate growing media (leca stones, long fiber sphagnum, bark slabs)
- Alternate growing methods (hydroculture, wick watering)
- Growing from seed
- Asian Gesneriads
- Photographing Gesneriads
- Gesneriads in the Wild
- Hybridizing Gesneriads
- Judging – Hold a Judge's School at the Arboretum
- Alpine/ Winter Hardy Gesneriads
- Other topics????

We would like to balance the arts and plant culture in planning the meetings. Please consider this list or any other ideas you may have. We will bring this up at the September meeting, so if you cannot make the meeting, feel free to email your ideas to one of your elected officers. I think we can attract some quality speakers from many places on the east coast; we know a lot of them. And most Gesneriad experts love talking about what they love!

ROOTS – MY BEGINNINGS WITH GESNERIADS

Jim Roberts

We all started somewhere with these plants. Some of us because of a chance encounter with a supermarket *Streptocarpus* or a *Sinningia speciosa* given to us by a friend. I'd like to start a column in *Petal Tones* where we each get to explain how we got started in this hobby. Since this is my idea, I guess I'm going to have to go first. Don't feel that your article has to be as long as mine, or as detailed. But by knowing more about how each of us got our start we can maybe think of ways to get others started.

Shortly after Barb and I got married back in 1972 we had an opportunity to rent an A-frame on a lake in Westminster, MA. We weren't real happy about where we were living and jumped at the opportunity. Barb has always been very interested in Library work. She was working at the Clark University Library in Worcester while I was finishing up my education. Anyhow,

shortly after moving to Westminster, Barb checked out the local library. Small but interesting. Of great interest was the head librarian.

Stan Kendig was ancient in the context of our short lives – probably close to 70 – and still worked 5 days a week maintaining the collection. Barb got to know him quite well, along with his live-in lady-friend Florence. We eventually got an invite to their house for dinner and that's when I discovered that Stan had a hobby. He grew and hybridized African Violets in his basement under lights. I'd always grown plants but had never tried AV's. After all I was still in my early 20's and had a lot of things that I still hadn't tried!

Stan shared some of his hybrids with me and shortly after that I found I had to set up my own plant stand to make room for these beauties. Stan got me interested in the local African Violet society which met at various members' homes. And that's where the real trouble started. One of the members was Jessie Crissafuli. Her home was a virtual plant heaven. Every window space was covered with plant material. What didn't fit on the windowsills was hanging in front of the window. The sun porch was so completely full of plants on all three sides that you really couldn't see out. And then there were the light stands in the basement where she grew the Saintpaulia.

And what plants! Sure, Jessie grew lots of big beautiful African violets, but she had hundreds (thousands?) of other plants scattered everywhere. She said that they were gesneriads and gave me a few dozen cuttings to start my collection. Every trip to Jessie's house yielded more information about these plants, and added dozens more to my collection. It was better than going to a greenhouse or botanical garden because every plant was grown as a show plant and all were available as free cuttings if I wanted anything.

I got involved. I not only belonged to the local and state AV societies, I also joined the American Gloxinia and Gesneriad Society. I entered shows, met lots of great people, and just had lots of fun. Mike Kartuz had his greenhouse set up in Wilmington, MA at that time. Stan introduced me to that great experience too. And Stan and I would make periodic trips to the Buell's greenhouses in Connecticut. Buell's was famous for their *Sinningia speciosa*, and Albert and Diantha Buell were happy to have someone visit to buy gesneriads and not just the African violets that made up most of their business.

What a great location for someone starting out in the hobby. So many sources for excellent plant material within an hour of my house. And that doesn't count the membership of the New England Chapter of AGGS. Great growers and hybridizers such as Frances Batchellor, Renee White, Anne Crowley, Peg Belanger. The list goes on and on.

In 1979 Emily Roberts came along. Barb wanted to stay home with our first born so we developed a stay-at-home business called "Village Plants." It wasn't all gesneriads at that time. We also grew a variety of houseplants that we sold through the town hardware store and at "plant parties" (kind of like a living Tupperware party). We got into the mail order end of things and sent out a printed catalog.

By the time Hanna came along in 1982 I was attending both the local and national shows. We were no longer selling anything except gesneriads and had a pretty interesting customer base. Barb would go out to the local post office every day and mail her packages. I still remember a catalog request from Christian Feuillet to be sent to French Guiana. The post office wanted to know if that was in Africa. We also had problems figuring out

where Lesotho was. Remember, those were the days before any of us had instant access to everything via the internet.

In 1984 we moved to Baltimore and changed the business name to Roberts' Gesneriads. We rented a U-Haul and drove the collection down, where it stayed in boxes for nearly 2 weeks before we could move in and set up lights. Not everything made it, but in a short time the collection was back up and growing. It had no objection at all to the heat and humidity of Baltimore. The house was air conditioned (we'd never even thought about looking for AC when we moved down – it just wasn't something that anyone had in central Massachusetts), but the humidity in the basement was ideal for just about everything.

We moved with the business one last time in 1988. By the time we stopped the business in 1992 we had a collection of about 1200-1300 different varieties. I kept a couple dozen for myself but gave just about everything else to Larry Skog and Christian Feuillet for the Smithsonian.

After a 14 year rest I'm at it again. Could be that a couple of visits with Mauro in Brazil got me started again. I don't know what really got me back into it. But I'm back! The list of plants is up to 268 varieties. I'm still trying to find some of my old hybrids. And I've got seedlings started now of my first new hybrid since giving it all up. It may not be anything worth keeping, but it's in the pot and I can't throw it out now until some of the seedlings start to flower.

All this because of a kindly old gentleman librarian who grew some violets in his basement. Share your plants. Let others

know how easy they are to grow. Bring a friend to a meeting. Grow plants in your office. Write an article for Petal Tones!!

UPCOMING MEETING DATES AND EVENTS

September 8, 2007: 10:30 AM Terrariums and Dish Gardens

November 10, 2007: 10:30 AM Streptocarpus

December 8, 2007: 10:30 AM **Christmas Party**

GREETINGS! FROM THE EDITOR

Summertime is a great time for enjoying the fruits our labors through winter and spring – with beautiful foliage and flowers coming into their own. There should be plenty of wonderful things on the raffle table and little show for September! We are all especially looking forward to Karyn Cichocki's presentation! Terrariums are one of my favorite things – but I have never really had help designing and planting one and so inevitably I discover the pitfalls the hard way and will greatly appreciate Karyn's assistance with terrariums and dish gardens. Thanks to Jim for his articles and all the participation from others that helps me out so much with the newsletter – especially Carol Hamelink and Jim Roberts's help with proofreading! Looking forward to seeing all of you at the September meeting.

Mark Zukaitis

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 four times a year, September through June, at 10:30 am on the second Saturday of the month. All are welcome. Please refer to the latest issue of Petal Tones, or contact our chapter president (Carol Hamelink) or publicity and membership chair (John Boggan) for more information.

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