



Petal Tones

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

Volume 39, number 3

March 2008

President's Greeting

Greetings everyone,

With just a short time left before our show, I'd like to encourage everyone to enter either a horticultural specimen or attempt a design entry. As our club is quite small, we need as much participation as possible to make a great show. Remember to let Laurene Jones know which design categories you will be entering, so you can have your niche reserved (nccsinger@cox.net). I will try to bring in some of my sale plants on Friday as well, so if you're looking for something to put in a design, come take a look.

Although it may seem intimidating to enter a plant that will be JUDGED by others, there is no penalty for entering plants that may not end up being considered to be blue ribbon potential. You may have the only entry of that species or cultivar, so that will help to let the public see the diversity of the gesneriad family of plants. If you plan to have more than 5 entries, please contact me for a pre-registration sheet if you don't already have one (hamelinkc@yahoo.com). This will help us to streamline the plant entry process. Don't worry if you show up without this - we won't turn you away!

Please let me know if you'd like to contribute to the awards for the show as well. No donation is too small. It can be monetary or something plant related. Also, as a reminder, if you can bring a side dish for our pot luck on Saturday, that will help balance out the KFC lunch. I'm looking forward to seeing all of you and your beautiful entries!

Happy growing,
Carol

Sinningia 'Gabriel's Horn'
grown by Carol Hamelink



A few of the raffle table plants at the February meeting.



Upcoming Events:

Show and Sale: March 15-16, 2008 (flyer on p.8)

Next meeting: May (details will be in the April issue of *Petal Tones*)

Show Update

by Jim Roberts

By now we're all agonizing over our plants. Is this one good enough to bring? Which of these two will the judges like? I can't bring this one; it's not big enough! Well, forget all that. Remember these three simple rules about entering in a show:

1) **Size doesn't matter.** Plants in a Gesneriad Show are judged on how well they are grown. Small plants in perfect condition can easily outscore larger showier plants because they have less for the judges to fault. The Best in Show is usually not the biggest or showiest entry. It's the BEST. When I judged the Long Island Chapter Show last spring, the Best in Show was a *Phinaea* in a small bubble bowl. Perfectly grown, but no where near as showy as the big *Kohleria* and other plants on the awards table.

2) **Shows are to educate the public.** Yes, we want to bring home an award or two, but if you have a plant that you think will make an educational contribution to the show, bring it. You may not think that the 6 open flowers on it are enough to get you a ribbon, but judges have been known to surprise. When I won Best in Show at the Convention in Baltimore in 1991, my plant only had 3 open flowers. A week later it had 30 or 40, but those first 3 flowers opened the day before the Convention. I brought it anyway since it was something that hadn't been seen in a show before. The judges loved it.

3) **There's only one blue per class.** That's true, but with all the classes that we have in our shows, you should be thinking "Wow! I can win a blue in every class I enter." Remember, you might have the only *Nematanthus* or the only *Nautilocalyx* in the show. Don't worry about competing against others. Assume your plant is all that's going to be there. And don't let the size and perfection of some of the plants that you've seen in our Little Shows scare you away. Those plants are probably sitting in a compost heap somewhere by now. Every show is a chance to shine.

This is our practice run before convention. Let's impress the judges (and ourselves). We have four teams (12 judges) coming down to look us over. Give them something to talk about.

And let's make sure that they have something to bring home with them to remember us by too. As you groom your plants, put the extra leaves and stems in baggies for the sale table. It's too late to try to root them now, but keep them in a cup of water so that they don't dry out and put them in a baggie the day before the show. Don't wrap the ends in anything. They'll actually last better if they're a little on the dry side.

The sale table is a good place to share extra seedlings and plants that have outgrown your lights. Plants that you have too many of. Plants that don't do well under your conditions or that you've simply grown tired of. Bring them in.

Out of plant tags? A basic window blind can be cut up to make hundreds of plant tags. They reportedly hold up very well too!

Make sure that your plants are priced in whole dollar amounts. We don't want to have to start making change. \$1, \$2, \$5 . . . any amount that works for you. Just no decimal points. Make sure that all plants have two tags. If one is a sticker with the name of the plant, the other should have your name (or initials) and the price on it. The volunteers working behind the table shouldn't have to search for the tag. If you use two tags in the pot, make them identical so that the volunteer can pull out either tag and not worry about removing the name of the plant from the pot and having the buyer grow a plant of "Judy Smith." Volunteers will help you price plants if you don't know what to charge. Donations are also accepted if you aren't interested in getting anything back when the monies are divided up. Remember, we have to pay sales tax and the Arboretum first, then the remainder gets split 60/40 (grower/club).

See you all on the 15th! Let's have a really great show!

JR

Thanks to Aarti Shah for putting together a colorful flyer for the show. Would it look nice on a bulletin board near you?

Two New *Petrocosmea*

by Jim Roberts

Back in the day when I grew and sold just about everything, I used to get a number of really nice plants from a friend who worked at the Hiroshima Botanical Gardens. He was able to obtain many new *Chirita* species from China, and shared a lot of them with me. I just got back in touch with him (thank you internet!!) and found out that Nagahide Nakayama is still growing and hybridizing some really neat stuff. It was fun catching up on our lives after all these years. His son is 17 years old and planning on going to an Engineering College next year. He didn't have a son when I last corresponded with him.

Anyhow, he shared pictures of two *Petrocosmea* hybrids that he's selected. The really interesting things about these two hybrids, at least to me, is that they are so very different and yet they both come from the same seed pod, and that the parents are both species. This really shows the value of growing on every seedling that you get when you hybridize.

As you know, *Petrocosmea* is not an easy genus to hybridize with, or even set seed on. Nagahide crossed *P. flaccida* onto *P. nervosa*. Out of one successful crossing he was able to grow on 50 seedlings. According to Nagahide, all of the seedlings were slightly different. One seedling produced many more flowers than the others and he named this one *P. 'Asa Blue'*. Very nice.



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Petrocosmea 'Asa Blue', grown by Nagahide Nakayama

However, it's the other seedling that he selected that should have the entire Gesneriad World clambering for a leaf. He hasn't named this one yet, but is still using the id #25 on it. What's so special? It produces flowers with a very ruffled edge when grown under cool conditions, and when also fed well, the flowers will sometimes be doubles!



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Petrocosmea cv. 25, grown by Nagahide Nakayama

And I now have both plants growing at home. This will be a challenge plant for all of us to grow for the 2009 Convention. And we should sell everything that we can propagate for the 2009 Convention Sales Room. I'll start sharing plants as soon as I can. Let me know if you're interested in growing either one. By the way, *Petrocosmea* 'Momo' was also his hybrid.

JR



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At left, a young plant of *P. 'Momo'*, grown by Amy Ray.

Petrocosmea flaccida and *nervosa* both hail from the Sichuan and Yunnan provinces of China.

What to Do With New Plants

by Kyoko Imai

When you're new to gesneriads, the sales table can be a little confusing, what with the bags of cuttings and leaves and rhizomes, and the pots with dangly string and all. Here's a quick primer on what to do with your new acquisitions. I'll try to hit some of the common questions and include some tips. The generalized propagation tips should be taken just so – the details will vary from plant to plant, and from grower to grower.

- **Plants in pots.** Some of the plants will be established flowering-size plants, while others will be seedlings or cuttings. Especially with the seedlings and cuttings, it helps to know whether the plant has been growing in a humid enclosure – a sudden move into dry air could dehydrate the plant. It also helps to check if the plant has a good root system. Without roots, the plant cannot draw up water from the potting mix. Gently check your plant to see if it has roots (a gentle tug might do the trick), and if not, keep it in a humid environment such as under a humidity dome, in a terrarium, or even in a clear plastic bag (such as a Ziploc freezer bag).



Plants from the sales table in 2005. Clockwise from upper left: *Kohleria* 'Silver Feather', *Kohleria amabilis*, *Petrocosmea forestii*, *Kohleria* 'Laura' and *Chirita* 'Stardust'.

- **Pots with string.** If there is a short piece of string hanging out of the pot, then that plant was probably wick-watered. In other words, the string dangled into a reservoir of water, and the pot was automatically watered as a result of the wick pulling water up from the reservoir. The potting mix used for wick-watering is usually lighter (less water-retentive) than a non-wicked mix, so you'll find that it dries out very quickly if not set up with a water reservoir.
- **Rhizomes.** Many gesneriad rhizomes need to be stored moist, or they will shrivel up and die. They can be broken into pieces and covered lightly with potting mix, or even broken up into individual "flakes" or "scales" and sown on the surface of the mix. The April 2007 issue of *Petal Tones* has a great article on propagating from rhizomes.



Phinaea rhizomes

- **Keep crowns dry.** Whether it's a plant or cutting, keep the crown or growing tip dry. The crown is where the newest leaves come out, and water in the crown can be a cause of rot. If it gets wet, try sopping up the water by touching a corner of a piece of kitchen paper to the crown – it will soak up the water without harming the plant.
- **Cuttings.** If the cutting looks dry, it may help to soak it in room temperature water before planting it. Also, I always re-cut leaves and stems under water. Most gesneriad cuttings will root well when placed in moist potting mix. If the cuttings are big, then you may want to cut it up into smaller pieces first. For example, I usually cut *Episcia* into 4-leaf stolons with about an inch of stem. With *Streptocarpella* and *Columnea*, I bury two or three leaf nodes, and use a very light mix. I prefer to put down

Codonanthe and *Aeschynanthus* as two-leaf cuttings rather than bury 1 or 2 leaf nodes.



Episcia stolons (cuttings)



Two 2-leaf cuttings of *Aeschynanthus* in the back, and a small tip cutting in the foreground.

- ***Isolate the plants and leaves.*** This is a general rule of thumb for any new plant - keep new plant acquisitions isolated and monitor them for pests and other problems. Even if the plants were inspected before the sale – indeed, even if the plants have been pest- and disease-free for months – it's always safer to keep them isolated. Common houseplant problems include mealybugs, mites, and powdery mildew, and early detection will help you deal with the problem.

February Meeting Wrap-Up by Kyoko Imai

Workshop: Sing Me a Love Song

Thanks to Jim Roberts for an excellent hands on workshop. Jim brought in lots of line material:



and containers:



and tools:



and more tools and some thematic material:



Here's Jim expounding on lines and containers and balance:



Glue guns and little plastic containers do the job behind the scenes.



Together with more plant material brought in by Carol H., NCAC members tried their hand at making their own:



Greetings From Your New Editor

Plant of the Month: Columnea

Jim and Carol also brought in lots of examples from the genus *Columnea* (from South and Central America), including species such as *sanguinea*, *cruenta*, *glicensteinii*, *schimppfii* and *ulei*. What a treat to see so many examples side-by-side. There's quite a range in the genus, including big red-tipped (on the underside) leaves, narrow leaves, and fuzzy leaves, with some suitable for baskets and others for pots. As I didn't manage to take photos this time, perhaps there is a *Columnea* article in our future.

You Have to See it in Person!

Do you remember the *Sinningia speciosa* photo in the February issue? Of Charles Lawn's breeding? Carol brought the plant in and I was astonished at the size of the flowers – and this is a young plant! Here's a hand in the frame for perspective:



As you know, Mark Zukaitis had to step down as Editor of *Petal Tones* on account of health issues. I'm sure we all continue to wish him a speedy recovery, and I hope he'll be back to take up the reins again. In the meantime, I am honored and delighted to serve as Editor. *Petal Tones* was one of the reasons I joined NCAC, and I truly hope we can keep it going as the wonderful newsletter that it is.

I'll be reinstating the "Desperately Seeking..." listings so - NCAC members - send me your wish lists. I'm also looking for "what's blooming" and "what's growing" write-ups, travel notes, photographs, articles, growing notes, culture questions, article requests, and any suggestions you may have. Visiting a grower? Ask to take some photos and do a little write-up. Stopping by a conservatory? I know you'll be keeping an eye open for gesneriads, so why not bring back a photo to share? Doing some plant maintenance? Tell us if you see something interesting or learn something new.

If you don't have a digital camera, I've got one you can borrow. If you can't email your submission to me, call me with the short ones (like wish lists), flag me down at a meeting, or mail it to me. I went back through the 2007 issues of *Petal Tones* and saw the same authors' names over and over - let's change that this year.

Kyoko

What's growing on my shelf:



Alien-looking new leaves on *Conandron ramondioides*



PLANT SHOW AND SALE MARCH 15 AND 16, 2008 *GESNERIADS*

Beautiful blooming gesneriad house plants will be on show and available for sale, including African violets, Chiritas, Kohlerias and many more.

Time: Saturday March 15 from 1pm-5pm, Sunday March 16 from 9am-4pm
Location: National Arboretum Administration Building, Washington DC,
3501 New York Avenue NE, Washington DC.

Sponsored by the **National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society**. Club members will be on hand to answer questions and give advice. Informational lectures and tours of the show are scheduled for Saturday afternoon and Sunday. For more information visit the web site <http://www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org/>.



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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