

Petal Tones

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

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings,

As summer approaches my mind turns to outdoor gardening. This year I am planning to expand my use of gesneriads outside. For the past several years I have grown many gesneriads on the shaded front porch all summer long. As long as they get enough water in our hot summers, they have done well. *Achimenes* have taken over my porch planter boxes, they bloom all summer long as long as they don't dry out and I love the rhizome harvest in the fall. I've got a couple new varieties this year to try to increase my color palette. I also find that the large *aeschynanthus* that I love, but have trouble finding space for indoors, do very well as hanging plants on the same shady porch. Last year I tried a few *Kohleria*, *Seemannia*, and *Achimenes* in a shade bed garden. They did so well that I am planning to do that again. *Kohleria* and *Achimenes* propagate so fast that I'm always running out of space to put them, but with the outdoor option, whole new vistas are open. These plants won't survive the winter, but I get enough rhizomes from my indoor collection to replant the next year. With the prolific production of propagules by *titanotrichum oldhamii* last year, I am looking forward to adding that to my shade garden as well. Jim Roberts reports that *titanotrichum* is hardy in his gardens with out digging up each fall, so that will be a welcome addition. Let me know which gesneriads you've had success with in your outdoor gardens.

Happy growing, Carol

UPCOMING MEETING DATES AND EVENTS

June Summer Picnic: June 9, 2007

With the onset of summer, many of us are spending more time in our outdoor gardens and less with our indoor gesneriads. In light of this, we have decided to produce the Petal Tones newsletter on a bi-monthly basis for the summer months. As the next issue will be coming out at the beginning of June I sent an email out about the club picnic. As you know, at the last meeting, we had not yet decided where to hold our summer picnic. Although there was an excellent suggestion to meet at Calvert Cliffs, it was decided that this was a little bit too far.

We will hold our picnic **JUNE 9 at the Greenbelt Park**, at the Sweetgum Picnic area beginning at 10:30 AM. This park is easily accessible from the capital beltway, and offers picnic tables, public restrooms, and grills. Although there is no pavilion, there is a lot of tree cover for shade. I was told we could bring pop up shade covers, as long as we didn't need to tie them to the trees. As this will be primarily a social event, please bring friends and relatives.

Jim Christ and I will provide hamburgers, sausages, buns and condiments. Please bring a dish to share with others. Also please RSVP to me (hamelinkc@yahoo.com) if you are coming, how many friends or relatives you are bringing and what dish you are bringing. This will be in an attempt to spread out the food selection.

In light of the unpredictable weather conditions at an outdoor park, we will not be holding the little show, or what's in bloom. If the weather is nice and you have something you'd like to share, feel free to bring it along, but be prepared to find a way to protect it from the elements if needed. We will still offer the raffle table items to share. So please bring your extra cuttings, rhizomes and starters, as this is always a highlight of our meetings.

Hope to hear from you soon,

Carol Hamelink

September 8, 2007: 10:30 AM Karyn Cichocki will be visiting from New York to teach us all how to make dish garden and terrarium plantings. The design concepts are the same; just some differences in scale and relationship to container. Karyn is giving a talk on this same subject at The Gesneriad Society Convention in Miami in July. Plan to attend and bring a friend. More details will be available in the next issue of Petal Tones.

October 13, 2007: 10:30 AM

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

GREETINGS! FROM THE EDITOR

Sorry about the change in Petal Tones distribution schedule, but with the summer here it is kind of hard to guarantee a monthly distribution, so we thought it was better to schedule it at a frequency we could better deliver to you.

It would be great to hear from all of you, to find out what is growing at this point and how it's all doing. Don't

forget to send me your wish lists so I can put them in.

WHAT WE GROW

The last couple of issues lists some of the things our members grow - and the April issue still awes me with the beautiful plants Carol Hamelink has so generously shared with us. Let's hear from any members who would also be willing to share! -Ed.



Titanotrichum Oldhamii



Titanotrichum oldhamii Flower detail – Hardy in Baltimore!

LITTLE SHOW RESULTS

Here are the Little Show results for the April meeting:

Section I Gesneriads in Flower

Class 2 Rhizomatous in Bloom:

Blue ribbon to Carol Hamelink for *Kohleria* 'Manchu' 97 points

Class 3 Fibrous New World in Bloom:

Blue ribbon to Carol Hamelink for *Episcia* 'Kee Wee' 95 points

Class 4 Fibrous Old World in Bloom:

Blue ribbon to Jim Hipple for *Streptocarpus* 'Bristol's Tractor Beam' 100 points!!

Red ribbon to Carol Hamelink for *Streptocarpus* 'Kim' 93 points

Section III Artistic

Class 12 Spring is Sprung:

Blue ribbon to Jim Roberts 97 points

Red ribbon to Carol Hamelink 90 points

Class 13 Miniature Magic:

Blue ribbon to Jim Roberts 95 points

Red ribbon to Carol Hamelink 94 points

Once again Carol takes sweepstakes with 2 blue in horticulture. Jim takes design sweepstakes with 2 blue in design. What I think is really amazing is that not a single plant or arrangement scored under 90 points. **Great growing and great showing!** And a special award should be given to Jim Hipple. He just joined our group at the February meeting. If his Strep is any indication of the way he's growing plants at home, we're all going to be learning a lot from him.

Thanks to our guest judges: Bob and Dee Stewart and Lee Linnet.

There won't be a Little Show at the picnic, but if you have something in bloom that you want to show the group your welcome to bring it for the "What's in Bloom" program. So let's all go overboard at the September meeting. We're not having a Fall Show this year, but all those plants that normally would be prime candidates for a Fall Show could be entered in the Little Show. Only one or two per class, please, but let's try to get some more widespread participation. Since the speaker is going to be Karyn Cichocki and the topic will be terrariums and dish gardens, let's all wow her with our "lack of skill" in this area. We'll do this in lieu of arrangements.

Check out these shots from our April Little Show:



Jim Robert's hanging arrangement – "Spring is Sprung"



Streptocarpus 'Kim' shown by Carol Hamelink



Carol Hamelink's hanging arrangement – "Spring is Sprung"



Kohleria 'Manchu' shown by Carol Hamelink



Jim Hipple's 'Bristol's Tractor Beam'



Episcia 'Kee Wee' shown by Carol Hamelink



"A Little Magic" by Carol Hamelink (left) and Jim Roberts (right)

Artistic and The Arts Classes for the September Meeting:

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).

Class 13: Terrarium – Either curved or straight sided glass enclosing the artistically balanced plant material.

Class 14: 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.

The Plant Raffle

The Plant Raffle has been a big hit at our meetings. Not only does it give members something to do while the judges are hard at work judging the Little Show, but it gives us all cheap access to a lot of new and exciting plant material. Even though there won't be a Little Show at the picnic, there will be a raffle. Bring plants, cuttings, seedlings, growing material, and in keeping with the outdoor season, extra garden plants that you're thinning out.



Jim Christ calling the raffle



A small section of The Raffle Table

NCAC TGS WEBSITE IS UP!

One of our newer members, Jim Hipple has put a lot of effort into our website! The site is now up and running, although much of it is still "under construction." Check out www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org. Even though it is under construction I can see how beautifully, and creatively it has been done. The back issues of Petal Tones will be posted soon, and links that are there mostly as placeholders now will soon be active. Please take a look at it before the picnic and bring your ideas for additions and I'm sure you'll have lots of compliments for Jim

Thank you Jim!

Ed.



Saintpaulia grandifolia #299 grown by Bill Price, photo by Irina Nicholson

I GAVE AT THE OFFICE

One thing I really enjoy about my hobby, is that I sometimes come up with really nice gesneriad gift plants. One such experience that was very gratifying, was when I worked at the law firm DLA Piper US – they have a huge all glass building in Mt. Washington, Maryland so there is a lot of light – and so many of secretaries had African Violets growing and flowering on the ledges where all the files and mail are left for the attorneys to pick up. I couldn't resist talking to some of them, and one in particular, Sandy loved growing them and told me how she was dying to get a cutting of a pink flowered one with blue spots. None of these people have any exposure to the gesneriad world other than the most successful member of the family, *Saintpaulia* but they do love their plants, and I couldn't resist bringing her a very small start of *Saintpaulia grandifolia*. As it turned out, another secretary makes self-watering African violet pots that she made a pretty good business selling around the office. I went for a period of probably three months without wandering by Sandy's area – and got an e-mail from her telling me how excited everyone in her area was about her plant! I went over to see it and couldn't believe it grew like that just in the ambient light of the office

(although the offices on the outside are solid glass walls, it probably did make the inner work areas a little brighter). It had at least 50 flowers, all flung around a plant about 10 inches across and was absolutely beautiful. Everyone could tell it was an African Violet – however, they had never seen one like *S. grandifolia*, and there were leaves sticking out of cups in the attorneys offices, and on their secretaries desks. They all wanted a cutting because it was beautiful, and, it was a "wild" African violet – just as it grows in nature and not available in any garden center, anywhere. That made it special too.

Since then I moved on to another law firm and have been there a couple of months, and the secretaries with their little pots (I showed them how to wick-water them) sitting in the best light they can give them, which looks pretty good to me. The plants are growing very well. I like to give *S. grandifolia* because I feel it is foolproof, but they also have *Episcia* and *Kohleria*. This has created such an interest that there is talk about having a growing group at the firm (well, I started it). Once we get into fall we are talking about getting interested people together for a little talk and sharing of some plant material, intended to send them off to their workstations and offices to see how these things will work out. They do enjoy having something different and, to them "rare". Maybe it isn't rare in our world, but our plants certainly rare in the world at large!

The managing partner told me to post "Petal Tones" on the bulletin board and said I could distribute hard copy to people who would like to receive it – but they have already been getting it by e-mail.

Hiding our light under a bushel will only keep the exposure to this material that inspires such passionate interest among those of us who have loved and grown members of this plant family for so many years – but letting it out among plant hungry secretaries might even increase our membership. I do know that it has increased the traffic on the gesneriad and other plant-related websites!

It really is a lot of fun! If any of our members has a story like this, please send it to me, it would be good to hear how your plants are received – and how various plants do in the hands of "non-experts" who have never even called a plant by it's Latin name (at least intentionally).

Keep on growing – and Spread the Wealth!
Mark Zukaitis

April Talk Summary - SOIL AND WATER

Bob Stewart and his wife Dee (Chirita 'Diane Marie' was named for her) were very accommodating, with their long drive to The National Arboretum from Massachusetts and going to all the trouble to bring some great plants for the raffle table!

Bob's talk was interesting and animated about the

properties of soil and water, and the interaction of the various components chemically with their environment and various things we like to add – such as fertilizer. I found it fascinating and very entertaining to hear about the reason water spot damage happens when you drip cold water on the leaves of a plant in the sun, is that the water vapor filling the open spaces within the cells of the leaf condenses, forming a wet patch that drowns the cells, and that over fertilizing actually desiccates the roots of the plant, causing the concentration of salts outside the cells of the roots to be greater than the concentration of salts within the cells of the roots, thereby attracting the water away from the plant and thereby drying the roots, causing the plant to flop over – in most cases permanently. This is a good reason to listen when people say to use plant food at quarter strength – or even one-eighth strength at every watering, and to periodically pour around a quart of water through the pot and soil to flush out salts that have build up and lessen the efficiency at which the plant can take up fertilizer.



Christian Feuillet, Larry Skog and Carl Taylor listening intently to Bob Stewart's extremely interesting and entertaining presentation on April 14, 2007

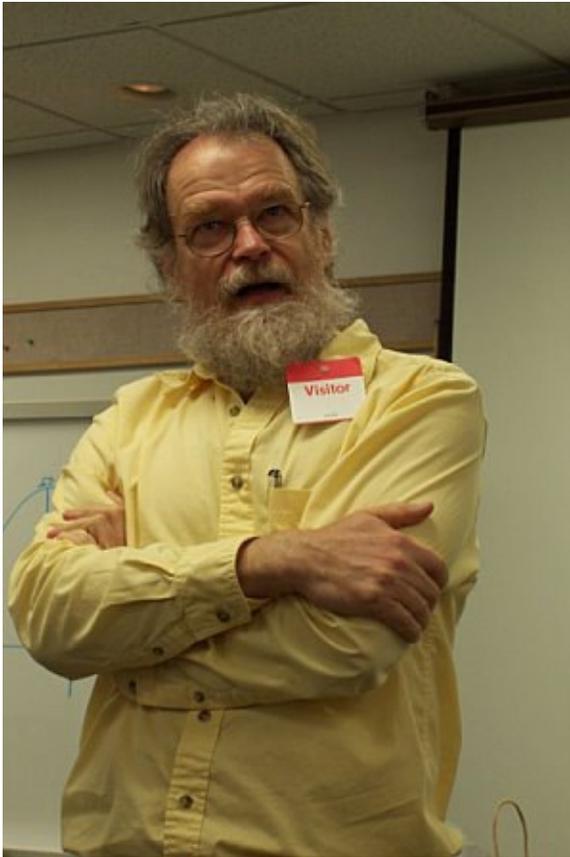
Vermiculite – that strange little hole-punch of mica that is heated until it expands, actually does more good in the soil as a cat-ion exchange facilitator, which means that phosphate will run right through the pot and is gone out the bottom, so it is a good idea to use a sparing amount of vermiculite in the mix, as the vermiculite chemically holds the phosphate molecules to itself, making it available for the plant to take up at its leisure. I don't know about you, but I was amazed by this fascinating information – and it is far from trivial even though a lot of people don't know that!

Capillary action is another thing to consider when constructing a substrate for your plants – capillary action is the action of water in a small space to be pulled upwards – as in the spaces between particles of soil, long-fibered sphagnum moss, sand, etc. This actually causes the water to be drawn up into the pot as Bob demonstrated with a bright pink sponge – he set it in a dish and showed us that the water had been taken up by capillary action. In other words the sponge was saturated. He lifted it and you could see the excess water

dripping away. When it was finished dripping, he turned the sponge over from having the short side vertical to now holding the long edge vertical and water began to once again pour from the bottom of the sponge showing that capillarity is in opposition to gravitational forces and that there are limits to how high the water can be pulled upward. The way water behaves in soil, it really is not necessary to have lots of crockery in the bottom – that just shortens the soil ball in the pot and keeps the soil more evenly moist. Dee Stewart uses a piece of window screen over the hole(s) and that is enough. The water will distribute itself after the run-off has been collected in the saucer.

It was a wonderful lecture and everyone was engrossed in what Bob was saying and his excellent presence.

Ed.



Bob Stewart gave the lecture at the April meeting

Brazil Seed Club Membership Protocol

Just a reminder that if you are a member of the NCAC TGS and would like to participate in this seed club, please send me an email and I will add you to the list. Three times a year, I get the seed availability list forwarded to me from Larry Skog. I then distribute this to everyone who has emailed me and asked to participate. Participants then select their top 6 seed orders and email that to me. The rest of the protocol can be found in the April issue of Petal Tones.

Bring those extra seedlings for the raffle table!!

Carol Hamelink

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.

The Gesneriad Society website: <http://gesneriadsociety.org> **NCAC website:** www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org
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