Petal Tones

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

Volume 39, number 8 September 2008

Message from President

Greetings Gesneriad fans!

I hope you've had a great summer. It's been a busy summer with several of us attending the Gesneriad Society Convention in Denver in July and then a convention planning meeting at Jim Robert's house in August. Although it is hard to let go of summer, a bright spot in this time of year is the reconvening of our club meetings. I hope to see you all September 13 for helpful tips from Brian Connor on growing beautiful Streptocarpus. People like Brian who grow them well make these plants look easy. But if you're like me and find them hit or miss, you'll want to catch this meeting to learn some of his secrets.

Then, for those of you who didn't get to Denver this summer, you're in luck with a slide presentation from the Convention at the October meeting. We're also having a dog show in October to help you figure out how to get that non-performing gesneriad on your shelf into show shape for the '09 Convention. See you soon.

Happy growing,

Carol

GEMS of the National Capital Area

Next Meeting: Streptocarpus

Streptocarpus is the theme for September's meeting! We are lucky to have Brian Connor to help us improve our growing skills. Don't forget to bring yours for a show and tell. We'll also have a raffle table, of course!

Streptocarpus Collection, shown at the NCAC 2008 Show.

In this Issue.....

Upcoming Events:

Next Meetings at 10:30 am, at the National Arboretum, Washington, D.C:

Sept. 13, 2008: *Growing Streptocarpus*; discussion on 2009 Convention arrangements

Oct 11, 2008: *Dog Show* (details tba); slides from 2008 Denver Convention

History and Culture of the *Streptocarpus* Part I

by Brian Connor

Commonly known as the Cape Primrose, *Streptocarpus* is actually a diverse genus of gesneriads, remarkable for its exquisite flowers and botanical oddity. Genetically, *Streptocarpus* is divided into two sub-genera, that are closely related to *Saintpaulia* (African Violets). Subgenus *Streptocarpella* (probably a separate genus - the "*Streptocarpus* with stems") is less well known but has a wider geographical range in Africa and Asia. This article will deal only with the subgenus *Streptocarpus*: stemless rosette type plants native to South Africa.

In nature, *Streptocarpus* is found along shaded river banks and hillside cliffs. The plants grow from gaps in the earth and crevices filled with moss, soil and pebbles. Even when there is a source of constant moisture, the roots are kept cool and well aerated. This is a crucial point to consider for indoor culture.

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The seedpods of *Streptocarpus* are characteristically twisted (*Streptocarpus* translates from Latin as "twisted seedpod"). Seedlings sprout as dicots, but then something bizarre happens. One of the cotyledons (seed leaves) dies and the other becomes the true leaf.

For a few species such as *Streptocarpus dunnii* and *S. wendlandii*, this is the only leaf that is ever produced and it may grow 1 to 3 feet in length. These species are monocarpic and usually die after flowering.

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Unifoliate seedlings of *S. (polyanthus x prolixus).*

Most species of *Streptocarpus* are perennials and produce multiple leaves after the single cotyledon in a stemless rosette. Let me emphasize that most species and nearly all hybrids will not die after flowering.

Streptocarpus rexii (white, light blue to light purple flowers) was the first recognized species and the first to be cultivated around 1820. More species followed, including the red flowered *S. dunnii* in 1884. In the late 1880s, *S. rexii* was crossed with *S. dunnii*, *S. polyanthus* (white to blue-mauve flower with white to yellow throat) and *S. cyaneus* (white to blue flower with distinct lines in the throat). Their offspring gave rise to the *S. rexii* hybrids, with white, blue, purple, pink or red flowers, often with a contrasting color or markings in the throat.

© Gustav Ciamaga

Wiesmoor hybrid *Streptocarpus*. Courtesy of http://gesneriads.ca/.

In the early 1950s, Fleischman introduced the Wiesmoor hybrids. The Wiesmoor hybrids were large plants with lovely flowers, 3 to 5 inches in diameter, often with ruffled edges. They were beautiful plants, but not easy to grow as houseplants and were often confused with (and mislabeled as) the *S. rexii* hybrids.

Around this same time a little known hybrid in Great Britain was produced (with *S. johannis* as a parent) called 'Constant Nymph.' As it turned out, this hybrid was less showy than the Wiesmoors but was remarkably floriferous and flowered intermittently throughout the year. It wasn't until years later that horticulturists fully realized that 'Constant Nymph' was an important breakthrough in *Streptocarpus* hybridization.

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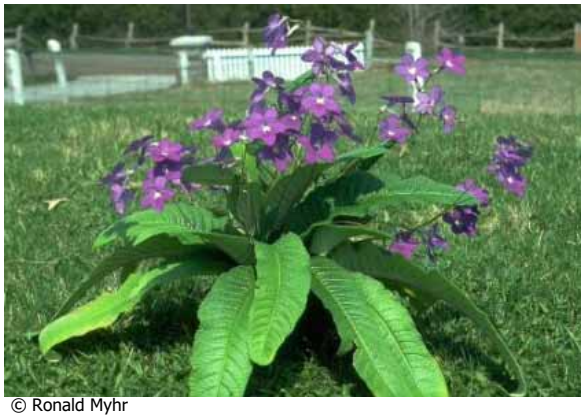
S. johannis wall planting at Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, Scotland. Courtesy of http://gesneriads.ca/.



© Ronald Myhr

S. 'Constant Nymph', grown by Ronald Myhr. Leaf span approximately 30". Courtesy of http://gesneriads.ca/.

Several other, very similar 'Nymphs' followed, all blue to purple flowered. Then the John Innes Institute began to extensively cross the Nymph series and *S. johannis* with other species and hybrids to create better, more floriferous plants in more vibrant colors. Plants such as 'Tina,' 'Fiona,' and 'Falling Stars' emerged in the 1970s and 80s and were marketed by Dibleys (http://www.dibleys.com).

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S. 'Falling Stars'.

The Dibleys became an important European hybridizer, introducing plants such as the lovely but ubiquitous 'Kim' and the Crystal series (using *S. kentaniensis* as a parent).

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S. 'Kim', shown at the 2006 NCAC Show.

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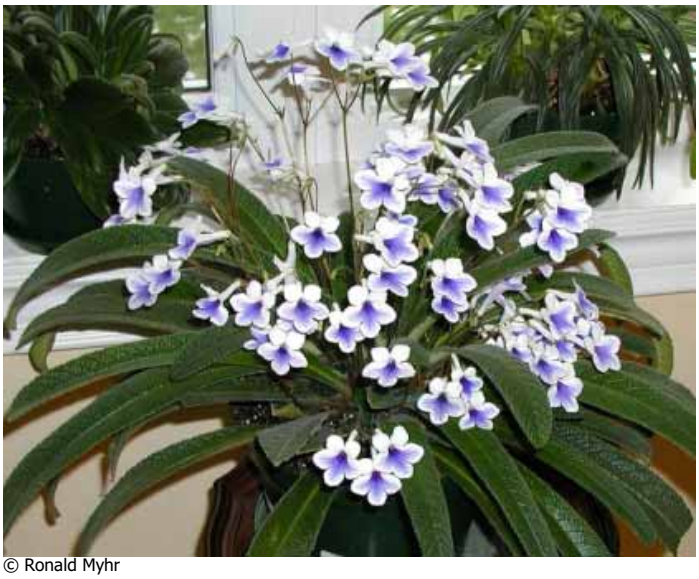
Hirsute leaves and buds of *S. kentaniensis*.



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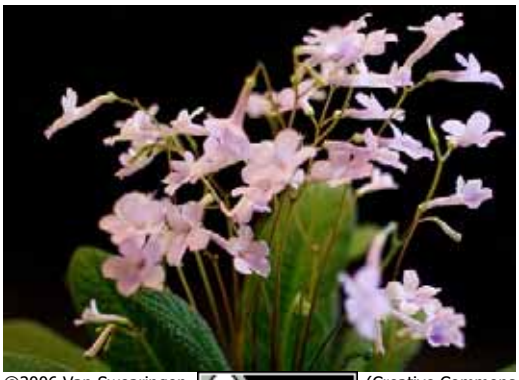
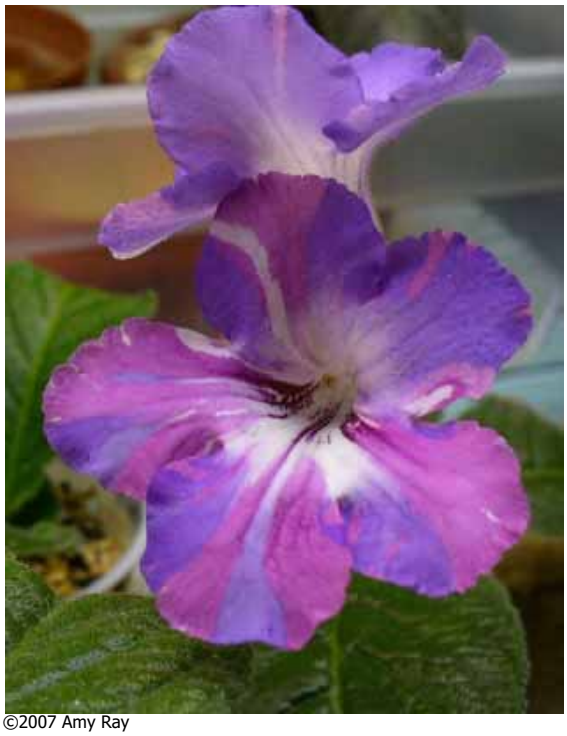
S. 'Crystal Ice', grown by Ronald Myhr. Courtesy of http://gesneriads.ca/.

Plants such as 'Crystal Ice' grew very narrow strap-like leaves in a more symmetrical rosette (the *S. kentaniensis* influence) and they are extremely floriferous under low light conditions. In Great Britain, Germany and Japan, *Streptocarpus* continue to be actively hybridized.



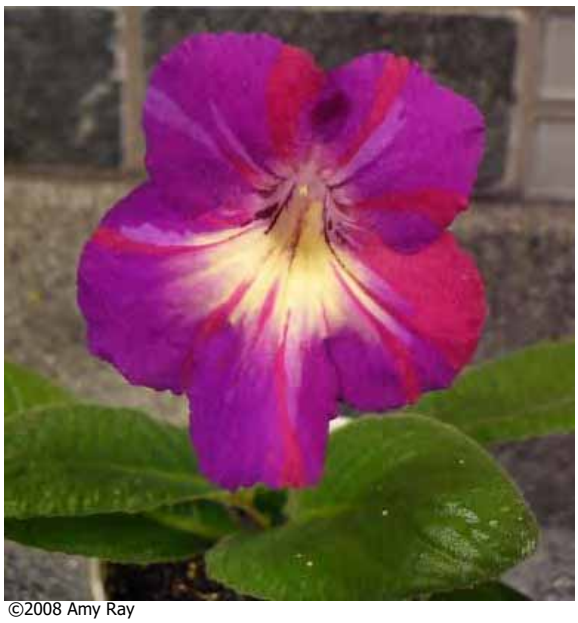
S. 'Lavender Rosette', grown by Al Romero, GSNY. This is a hybrid by Dale Martens, registered in 1998. *S.* 'Pegasus' x *S. kentaniensis*.

Meanwhile, back in America, Jonathan Ford pioneered *Streptocarpus* hybridization and introduced such plants as 'Something Special' and the double 'Chorus Line.' Lyndon Lyon (http://www.lyndonlyon.com) and Rob's Violet Barn (the Bristol series, http://www.violetbarn.com) produced fantasy flowers such as 'Space Dust,' 'Bristol's Party Boy' and 'Bristol's Party Girl.'



S. 'Bristol's Party Boy'.

Dale Martens ('Texas Hot Chili'), Lee Stradley (hybrids with *S. lilliputana*), Dennis Miller ('Neil's Strawberry') and others have produced an amazing array of innovative hybrids. However, the most prolific hybridizer in recent years has been David Thompson. He has burst onto the scene with 20-30 striking, free flowering hybrids such as 'Purple Peppered,' 'Summer Parfait,' 'Spin Art,' 'Remembering John' and too many others to list.



S. 'Spin Art'.

Two important trends in *Streptocarpus* hybridizing are variegated leaves and fragrant flowers. Plants such as 'Iced Pink Flamingo' and 'Iced Amethyst Showoff' have wonderful white and green variegated leaves. Offspring from crosses with *S. candidus* and *S. vandeleurii* may have scented flowers.

NEXT

Streptocarpus Culture, or come to the September meeting of the National Capital Area Chapter of the Gesneriad Society to hear all about this fascinating genus.

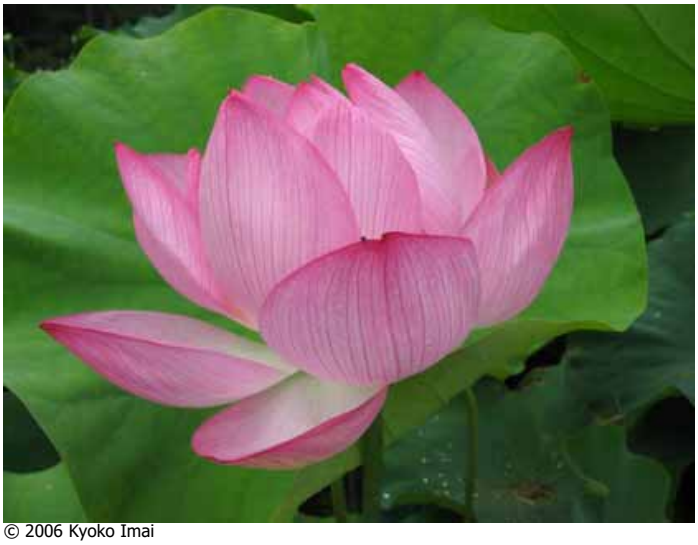
Please check out these wonderful websites: The Gesneriad Reference Web http://www.gesneriads.ca/ and http://www.streptocarpus-info.com.

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens
http://www.nps.gov/keaq/
by Kyoko Imai

The water gardens at Kenilworth are our local feature this month (even though there are no gesneriads there).

Part of the National Park Service, the park is located in northeast D.C., and is accessible by canoe (not kidding - they say so on the website) from the Anacostia River.* A quick look at a map will show that the Kenilworth is across the river from the National Arboretum.

Summer is the season for lotus flowers: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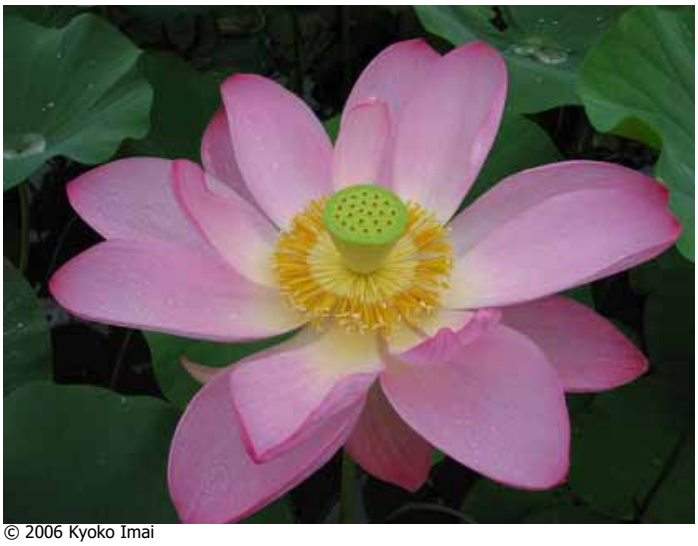
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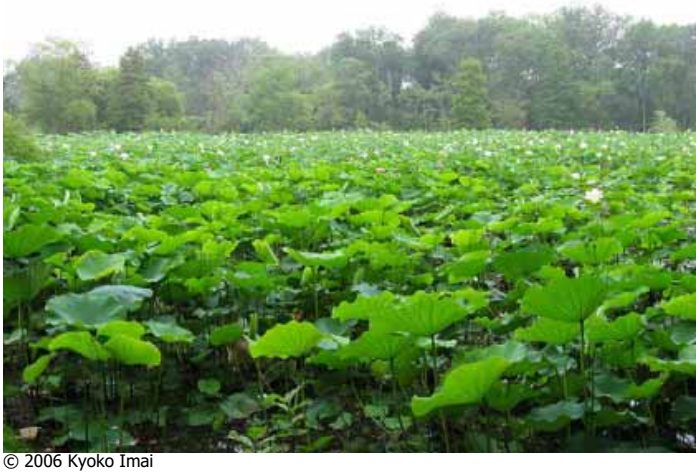
* More conventionally, access is by car or Metrorail/bus.

Formerly Shaw Gardens – a business owned by Walter Shaw – the gardens were purchased and added to Anacostia Park in 1938.

Although the park does have a landscaped water garden, the main feature is a gigantic field of lotus: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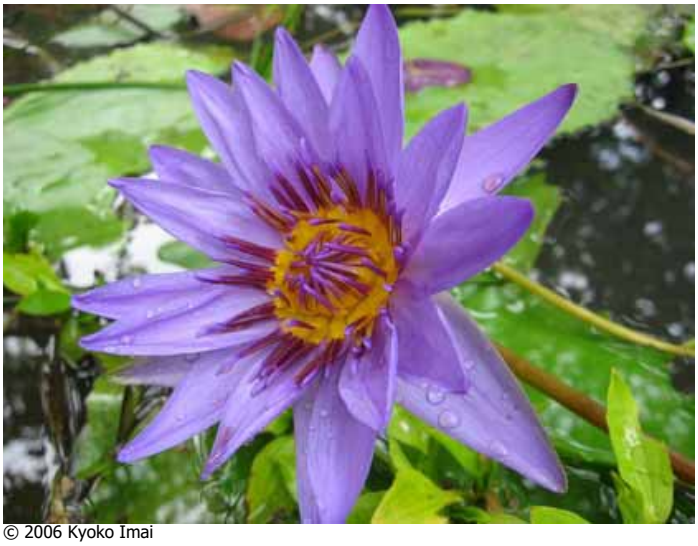
Actually, there a numerous ponds, including some with lilies. There are also tropical lilies that spend most of the year in a greenhouse.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Beyond the lotus field is an extensive boardwalk (see the satellite view of Google Maps) from which the tidal wetlands can be seen. The park is also a birding destination.

Information on the Anacostia Watershed is available at http://www.anacostiaws.org, the website of the Anacostia Watershed Society.

A (Spur of the Moment) Buying Spree at Lyndon Lyon

by Brian Connor

The Baltimore African Violet Club planned a visit to Lyndon Lyon Greenhouses in upstate NY and then cancelled the trip. I had already taken a few days off from work… but needed the time off to accomplish some chores around the house. However, on Thursday night images of gesneriads filled my head. Could I take a day trip to Dolgeville, NY and return to Baltimore in time to be sipping a gin and tonic at my favorite night club?

I could, in fact, and I did.

Mapquest listed 33 steps from Baltimore to Dolgeville (no way!). Instead, I took I-83 from downtown Baltimore to Harrisburg, PA, and picked up I-81 to Syracuse, NY. From there I traveled east on Route 90 to exit 29A (Dolgeville). It took 6 hours and 40 minutes on the way up, but about 8 hours on the way back due to road repairs (closed traffic lanes, etc.) around Scranton, PA. I really needed that gin and tonic when I finally arrived home!

At the greenhouse I found beautiful, well cared for plants! You can see for yourself - although my photography does not do justice to the gesneriads. [*The full story is that Brian picked up a disposable camera just to share photographs with us! -Ed.*]

A small section of the enormous greenhouse which houses tens of thousands of plants:

A Chenille plant has taken over this corner from the violets:

Highlights for me were the hundreds and hundreds of African Violets, Streptocarpus (including recent David Thompson hybrids like 'Spin Art' and 'Remembering John'), *Achimenes* 'Ambroise Verschaffelt,' *Sinningia* 'Amizade,' *Coltrichantha* (now *Columnea*) 'Midget' and *Columnea teuscheri* (*Trichantha minor*).

Columneas - I can't grow them like this at my house!

Achimenes 'Ambroise Verschaffelt':

A mix of Chirita species and hybrids:

I spent less than $200, so I consider that I was well behaved. Maybe the next time I can talk one of you into going on a road trip in search of exotic violets and gesneriads.

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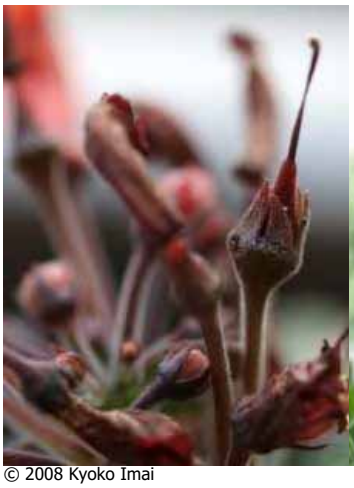
Close-Up of Two Sinningia Seeds
by Kyoko Imai

I recently harvested seed from two Sinningias I have outside, *Sinningia* ('Tampa Bay Beauty' x self) and *Sinningia tubiflora*. TBBxS will continue to bloom through the fall and form it's last seedpods into the winter, but *S. tubiflora* looks like it is done for the year.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This is a cross-section of a seedpod of *S. tubiflora*:


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Below is a comparison of the seed found in each: TBBxS first, and *tubiflora* below. It's most likely that these are selfings, but as I can't be sure I've sown some seed from each of the pods.


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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 usually 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: www.gesneriadsociety.org **NCAC website:** www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org

NCAC/AGGS