

AFRICAN VIOLETS

African violets are a genus of herbaceous flowering perennial plants that are comprised of approximately 6-20 different species. They are members of the Gesneriaceae family and are native to Tanzania. They are commonly sold as a tropical evergreen flowering houseplant. In their native environment these plants grow in cloud forests and some species have become endangered due to their habitats being cleared for agriculture. The most common species we tend to see on the retail market is the *Saintpaulia* African violet, which has become popular due to its compact growth habit and large sprays of showy blooms in a variety of colors. The plants get their common name from their superficial resemblance to true violets. The genus is named after Baron Walter von Saint Paul-Illaire, who discovered them in Tanzania in 1892. Due to their tropical nature, African violets are highly sensitive to temperature changes and do not tolerate cold water on their leaves well. Although they do present some challenges, they are an excellent choice for any hobbyist grower and can bloom multiple times per year.



Latin Name: *Saintpaulia ionantha*
Type: Evergreen herbaceous flowering houseplant
Hardiness: Not frost hardy
Size: 12-16"
Exposure: Bright indirect light
Soil: African violet specific potting mix
Growth Rate: Medium
Growth Habit: Mounding

Where should I plant my African violet?

African violets are a popular houseplant that can flower multiple times in a year if their cultural needs are met. They enjoy bright indirect light at about 1,000-foot candles for 6-8 hours per day. They do well on sunny windowsills and can also be grown under artificial light. These plants prefer to be slightly rootbound to flower well do not need to be repotted often. African violets also enjoy relative humidity, which can be achieved by placing the plant over a tray filled with water and pebbles or periodically placing the plant in a glass cloche. These plants also need African violet specific soil, which is widely available on the retail market.

How much water will my African violet need?

Proper watering is critical to the success of growing African violets. They need a happy medium of moisture and prefer to be watered from the bottom. This means that the plants should sit in a pool of water for about 20-30 minutes depending on the size of the plant with the remaining water discarded after. Plants in high light with low humidity will require more frequent watering than those in a high humidity situation. It is imperative not to overwater African violets as they are susceptible to crown and root rot.

When should I fertilize my African violet?

African violets respond well to a regular fertilizing schedule. Water soluble African violet specific fertilizer applied once per month will usually promote success. They are susceptible to salt build up and should not be over fertilized.

Are there any pests or diseases I should be aware of?

African violets can suffer from a few pests and diseases such as aphids, thrips, mealy bugs, *Botrytis* and root/crown rot. Insects can be treated with systemic and root rot can be repaired by letting the plant dry more between watering.