

## **African Violets**

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January is a good time to brighten our homes with flowering houseplants. African violets are the most popular flowering houseplant in the country. In fact, they are one of the easiest flowering houseplants to grow, and stay in flower all year long. Colors available include shades of blue-violet, fuchsia, pink and white. There are also varieties that have double petals and petals with contrasting borders. Most grow in four inch pots, so you are sure to find room on your windowsill for a few of these little beauties.

The botanical name is *Saintpaulia ionantha*, in honor of Baron Walter von Saint Paul, who discovered the African violet in a warm shady spot in East Africa in 1893. True to their origins, they love night temperatures around 60 ° and daytime temperatures around 75-80° and bright indirect light. Choose a window that faces north or east rather than one exposed to midday and afternoon sun. African violets can be grown entirely under artificial light, and will thrive with 10-12 hours of fluorescent light.

Most people think that African violets are a little “touchy”, but they just like things done in a special way. Avoid splashing cold water on their leaves, because it will cause ugly white splotches to form. Water when the soil surface is slightly dry to the touch, using tepid water, and avoid splashing water on the foliage. You may water from the bottom, by placing the pots in a pan of tepid water, making sure the water is not deeper than the rim of the pot. When the soil is moist on the top remove from the pot from the water and place on a saucer to drain. Another method is to use a wick in the

bottom of the pot, extended through the drainage hole into a saucer. These pots are available where you purchase African violets.

Choose water-soluble fertilizers that are designed for African violets. Follow directions on the label and feed either once a month or every time you water with a dilute solution. Soil for African violets should be porous, allowing water to pass through easily. There are several commercial soil mixes available.