

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Part II of Two Parts

Of the flowering houseplants, African violets are among the most popular. Their blossoms may be single or double, plain or ruffled, and range from white or blue through pink to red hues.

They grow best in moist potting soil in indirect sunlight. Warm temperatures with high humidity, moderate temperatures with moderate humidity, or cool temperatures with low humidity are all suitable for African violets. The plant's leaves should be kept dust-free by washing with soapy room-temperature water; then allow to dry thoroughly in a shady place before returning to the growing area.

Fibrous rooted begonias have succulent stems and shiny leaves; they produce red, white or pink flowers continuously if given adequate full sunlight and if watered when the surface soil feels dry and powdery.

The large white, yellow, coral, orange, pink, or red flowers of tuberous begonias make outstanding displays whether potted as house plants or as bedding plants in shady places.

All begonias develop best in humus soil that is kept moist but not overwatered. To keep tuberous begonias blooming throughout the year, use artificial light to supplement filtered sunlight four hours each night during the winter months.

Brilliant pink or salmon flowers grow from the edges of the younger parts of the Christmas cactus. This plant may fail to bloom if exposed to high temperatures or artificial light during the evening. Beginning in September, keep your Christmas cactus in total darkness with no artificial light for at least twelve hours every night.

During the summer grow the plant in a cool, shaded area. This plant may be propagated from pieces of branches two or three segments long, following propagation techniques described below.

Gardenias seldom do well as house plants as they are persnickety about their environment. If night temperatures rise above 65°, the flower buds drop; if night temperatures go below 62°, the leaves turn yellow.

In spite of this, many people attempt to grow them, and perhaps are satisfied with their fine glossy foliage; occasionally a gardenia plant will produce a few small fragrant blossoms in late spring.

If you are determined to attempt it, pot your gardenia in humus soil, keep soil moist, and grow in full sun for the plant needs warm temperatures during the day. Medium humidity will help.

Geraniums, on the other hand, are a favorite flowering houseplant. If potted in regular soil which is allowed to dry moderately between waterings, given full sun, cool temperatures, and low to medium humidity, your geraniums should flower profusely.

Ideal night temperatures are 55° to 60°F; if kept above 60°, flowering may be inhibited. Leaves and stems rot easily, so don't let water stand on these parts of your plant. Propagate by cuttings.

One of the few houseplants you can grow easily from seed is Impatiens. It will bloom about three months after seed is planted and produce flowers continuously thereafter. Use regular potting soil, keep soil moist, grow in full sun, warm temperatures and medium humidity. Pinch tips of plant to make them branch. Keep plants warm; leaf drop occurs at temperatures below 65°.

For brilliantly colored flowers, nothing tops the fuchsias; they need a well-drained soil and night temperatures of 60° to do their best. High night temperatures and low light intensities inhibit flowering. Keep soil moist but not wet; grow in subdued daylight. During the day, both temperature and humidity should be moderate. Remove ends of stems frequently to promote branching. Fuchsias may be propagated from cuttings.

For best growth and inducing flowers, water your houseplants with a dilute fertilizer solution. You can make your own by mixing 1½ teaspoons of soluble fertilizer such as 20-20-20, or 1 tablespoonful of liquid fertilizer such as 8-12-4, in one gallon of water.

Propagation of house plants is not only easy, it's fun. Starting new plants from old ones could soon crowd your indoor greenery, but they make ideal gifts for shut-in friends or neighbors who admire your year-round flowers.

Take a cutting with four or five leaves from the growing point of the plant, cutting just below a joint. Root the cutting in moist perlite, vermiculite or pond sand. You may want to pasteurize the rooting medium by heating the moist material in an oven for an hour at 180° to 240°.

Put the rooting medium in a small clay pot with a drainage hole in the bottom. Insert the cutting in the moist rooting medium. If you cannot plant it immediately, keep it fresh in water.

Now place the potted cutting in a polyethylene or clear plastic bag and close with a "twist em". Place the bagged pot in diffused daylight where the temperature is about 65° to 70° F.

Once a week, open the bag and test the cutting by pulling on it, gently. When the cutting resists a gentle tug, it is rooted and may be removed from its miniature greenhouse.

Geraniums, impatiens, African violets, coleus, ivy and philodendron can be propagated from cuttings rooted in tap water.

If sections of diffenbachia are pressed into damp moss, shoots will grow from the eyes in the sections. These shoots can be removed and used as cuttings. Make the cane sections two or three joints long, dust the ends with fungicide and press into damp sphagnum moss. The eyes will continue to produce shoots as often as shoots are removed.

If plants have fleshy leaves or thick leaf stems, such as African violets, use the leaves as cuttings. Insert the leaf stem in tap water or in a moist rooting medium and treat as you would tip cuttings. New plants will form where the leaf and stem join.

Certain plants produce underground stems or rhizomes and may be propagated by division. Garden plants such as iris are a familiar example. Cut the rhizome into sections, each of which contains a leaf bud. New plants will grow from the potted rhizome sections.

If the plant produces tubers, like potatoes, cut the tuber into pieces that each contain an eye; new plants will sprout after potting.

Ferns produce runners; these will root easily if pegged to the soil. A wooden clothespin makes a good peg for rooting fern runners.

Large and difficult-to-root plants can be propagated by air-layering. Azaleas and rhododendron are examples. To air-layer, make a cut into the stem, near a growing end of a branch. Place a toothpick in the cut to keep it open. Wrap moist sphagnum moss around the cut stem and enclose the mossed stem in an envelope of clear plastic. Tie the plastic at both ends around the stem to form a moisture-proof package.

When roots form in five or six weeks, you will see them through the plastic; cut off the new plant below the new roots. Pot or plant it.

House plants are fussy about a few things. They don't like sudden changes in environment such as being moved from strong to dim light, cold drafts, heating or cooking gas, or overwatering.

Have a lovely indoor garden this winter!