African Violets

Enchanted Forest Nursery & Stone

1116 Kempsville Road
Chesapeake, VA 23320
757-549-9667
www.enchantedforestnursery.com

Fertilizer

Violet food is specifically labeled for African violets. A good violet food should have approximately equal amounts of the primary nutrients, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). These elements are normally found on the front label. Many fertilizers that have been labeled for African violets, in fact, contain impurities that can be harmful to violets. Urea, for instance, is a commonly used source of nitrogen. While it is often cheaper to use than other sources of nitrogen, urea is known to cause root burn on African violets. The damage caused by root burn reduces an African violet's ability to properly absorb water and nutrients. The most obvious signs of this are pale leaves and diminished flowering. Therefore, when selecting a fertilizer suitable for African violets, make sure that it does not contain urea nitrogen. This can easily be determined by looking at the Guaranteed Analysis on the fertilizer label. Make sure that it is 100 percent water-soluble. This is important for two reasons: First, if your violet food is not 100 percent water-soluble, your African violet may not be able to absorb all its elements. Second, unless your violet food is 100 percent water-soluble, you cannot use it in a self-watering device. When using one of these devices, elements will only be drawn into the soil if they are fully dissolved.

In addition, it is important to drench the soil. This will wash away any excess fertilizer salts that have accumulated in the soil, while restoring the proper balance of the elements that African violets need. To leach the soil, simply drench it with water until it has become saturated, and than allow the excess water to drain completely.

Water

In general, African violets need just enough water to keep the soil moist, but never soggy. Too much water will leave your African violets susceptible to root rot and crown rot. Over-watering can also cause de-nitrification, a condition, which prevents plants from getting the nitrogen they need. The water should be room temperature, or as close as possible in temperature to the air around your plants. When the water is too cold, it chills the roots of African violets, causing leaves to curl down as the water is absorbed into the plant. (Note: It is always important not to get water on the leaves. The only exception to this is when you are spray misting for purposes of quick feeding or increasing the humidity around your plants. Such misting will not leave behind the large water droplets which, when exposed to the sun or lights, will produce brown spots on the leaves.)

Never use soft water. Soft water increases the saline content. This will alter both the pH and the electrical conductivity of the soil, thereby diminishing your African violet's ability to absorb water and nutrients. If you have soft water, you may be able to divert water before it reaches the softening unit. If not, you will need to seek an alternative source of water.

Avoid using highly chlorinated water. The consequences of using water with too much chlorine in it include leaf burn and diminished flowering. If you have highly chlorinated water, and no alternative source is available, dispense water into a container and let it stand overnight to allow the chlorine gas to escape.

Grooming

A good grooming routine is important. It will help keep your African violets looking beautiful as well as keeping them healthy. When done on a regular basis, grooming takes very little time.
To maintain a consistent routine, groom your African violets as part of your regular watering schedule.
Look for potting soil or other debris, which may have accumulated on the leaves. Dust, dirt and other debris may be removed using a soft-bristled brush, such as a small artist paintbrush or make-up brush. Note, however, that any brush of this kind should be reserved exclusively for use on your plants.
Next, inspect your African violets for spent blossoms. Also, keep your eyes alert for leaves that are damaged. Spent leaves and flowers encourage rot that, under the right conditions, can spread to healthy parts of your African violets. Damaged leaves and flowers leave your African violet vulnerable to bacterial diseases, viruses and other microorganisms, such as Nematodes.

Temperature & Air Quality

You should keep the air temperature around your African violets as close as possible to 70 degrees F. At the very least, do not allow temperatures to drop below 60 degrees F or rise above 80 degrees F. Also, while extreme variations in temperature should always be avoided, do not be concerned about slight fluctuations between day and nighttime temperatures. Good air circulation, especially when the air is damp, helps prevent the growth of such fungi as Botrytis and Powdery Mildew.

Light Requirements

The amount of light that an African violet receives is important for its health and overall performance. African violets need light for photosynthesis. While photosynthesis is most often associated with a plant's green leaves and stems, its most vital function is to convert carbon, hydrogen and oxygen (in the form of carbon dioxide and water) into usable energy called plant carbohydrates.

If an African violet does not get enough light, it will stop flowering and its leaves will begin to turn yellow. It is also likely that the African violet which is not getting enough light, will become rangy as it develops elongated leaves and stems.

It is important to remember that African violets need at least eight hours of darkness, each day, in order to bloom. While African violets need a sufficient duration of light to produce florigen (flowering hormone), florigen itself does not trigger blooming until it is dark. For this reason, African violets should receive light for no more than 16 hours a day. To properly regulate the duration of light.

When growing under lights, it is very important to remember to replace the tubes, at least annually. If growing for show, replace your tubes approximately 3 months before the show date.

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