

Keeping Your Collection Manageable

by Alana

How Many Av's Are Too Many?

One mistake, many of those new to collecting African violets make, is to add too many plants or leaves to their collection before they have enough knowledge to handle a large amount of violets. It is certainly hard to resist the temptation to have as many as you can get when you first discover the vast variety of named African violets.

However, you can quickly find yourself overwhelmed with having to care for them all and your collection as a whole will suffer. Most collectors are generous souls and the newbie can be the recipient of many packages of African violet leaves for only the cost of postage. Here are a few points to keep in mind to make sure your new hobby is "fun" and not a "chore"!

1. Decide how much room you have for your plant hobby. Calculate the space required for each full grown plant. If space is limited you may want to collect semiminiatures or miniatures although some feel these are harder to grow for new ones. Yes, do the math -- you really don't have the space to "grow them all"! It is better to grow a few plants successfully than many plants which are suffering from lack of care.

2. Don't order a bunch of leaves from a vendor before you have mastered the art of propagating from leaves -- practice on your No-Names, it costs less to lose them. Do not try and save all the babies you get from each leaf or you will soon be overrun. If you have an order of 20 leaves and keep 4 babies from each leaf, you will need to have space for 80 full grown plants. At first you may be tempted to save all the plantlets because you are afraid of losing some, but as your confidence grows you should be able to cull plantlets and some will have to end up in the compost.

3. Culling is also important in deciding which plants really appeal to you. If you are not impressed with a variety of african violet then compost it or find it a new home. You will then have room to devote to the varieties you really like.

4. It is important to educate yourself on the symptoms of disease and pest infestations. Is that white stuff in the pot perlite or mealybugs? Make sure to isolate any new plants to your collection so they don't spread whatever they bring with them. If you can't identify a pest or disease problem early on it can wipe out your entire collection.

5. Not all varieties will grow for you and look like the one in the photo you saw that you just "had to have". If you are not having success with that coveted variety, it is best to move on and spend your time on the varieties that appreciate the growing conditions you are providing.

6. Each year the vendors come out with photos of beautiful new varieties in their catalogues. If you want to try a few new varieties each year, then determine how many you have space for and if you will need to cull your collection to make space for them.

7. To grow out your violets to their full potential, you will need to give them the correct light, fertilizer and amount of water that they require. They also need to be cleaned and groomed of extraneous or damaged leaves to develop beautiful foliage. Suckers must be removed, too, or they will distort the plant. You need to be constantly checking for anything attacking your collection, as well, so you can treat it as needed. Then there is the need for repotting every 6 months for the Standards and every 3 months for the Semis and Minis. Also, if you are propagating from leaves, there will be many babies to be potted up. Leaching is needed regularly to remove excess fertilizer salts and chemicals which can alter soil PH and damage plants. This involves running tepid water through the top of the soil until the water that runs out is clear.

8. You will need to decide how many plants you can happily give the care required in step 7 above. If you find you are not enjoying the work involved in keeping your plants looking beautiful, then you have too many!

9. My advice for newbies is to limit your collection to no more than a couple of dozen until you are experienced in all aspects of African violet care. You will then be in a better position to know how many plants you can keep without being overwhelmed. Then you can really enjoy this hobby!

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