

# Vintage Violets

A Vintage violet is any violet that was registered at least 25 years ago. As newer splashier varieties have come on the scene less and less people are growing these older varieties and many are no longer available. Vintage violets are our history and we should all strive to grow a few in our collection.

Commercial growing of African Violets in the United States began in 1926 when Armacost & Royston of West Los Angeles, California imported seeds from Benary in Germany and Sutton in England and introduced the plants to the trade. The original ten were introduced in 1935. They are Blue Boy, Admiral, Amethyst, Commodore, Neptune, Norseman, Sailor Boy, Viking, Number 32 and Mermaid. Blue Boy was the most popular of these early cultivars and his foliage type, boy foliage, is still the most common. In the next 20 years interest in African violets increases among commercial and amateur growers to the point that in 1946 a national society was formed

A sport is defined as a sudden change or variation. Sometimes when an African violet leaf is rooted, a plant which is radically different appears among the plantlets. This is a true sport or mutant. A violet that has unusual characteristics, such as fantasy type bloom, has offspring that are solid are said to revert to an earlier parent and are not truly considered sports, although sport is commonly used for any blooming plant that is not like the parent .

In the history of African violets many of the important developments in evolving the beautiful plants we have today came from true sport mutations. The first double was a sport of Blue Boy in 1939, Duchess. Mutation may occur naturally as in the case of variegation. The first variegated violet, Tommie Lou was introduced by Mrs. Tommie Louise Oden, in 1957, and was the result of a single baby mutant from White Pride.

Mutation may result in the hybridizers working with the plants genetics to try and come up with a sport. In 1942 the first pink, Pink Beauty was developed, first white shows up in 1943, girl-type foliage appeared in 1943, blue girl. A double white was developed from a pink and blue cross. In 1947 the first red and bi-colors appeared

Early hybridizers Harold Reinhardt and Lyndon Lyons worked with the first variegated plant and came up hybrids such as Top Dollar, Nancy Reagan, Happy Harold and Lyndy Lou. The Lillian Jarrett type of variegation or now more commonly known as mosaic variegation was introduced in 1989 by Frank Tinari.

The Tinari greenhouses introduced the first trailers. The first trailer was introduced at the 1954 AVSA convention. It was called "Wild Girl". However, that was also the year the first double pink violet from Lyndon Lyons was also introduced and it was not well received. Enthusiasm for trailers only started to grow when Lyndon Lyons introduced Violet Trail, Pixie Blue, and Pipsqueek, which were semi and miniature trailers, in 1966.

The first miniatures were introduced in 1951. Frank Tinari registered the first semi mini's in 1957. They were Helen Van Pelt Wilson and Red Glow.

Some of the most interesting mutants are the chimeras. They happen when the mutation affects only a segment of the tissue and two or more genetically distinct segments or layers of tissue will grow next to each other. The blossoms are characterized by a definite pattern of stripes. The earliest registered chimera is Mauna Loa.

Holtkamp Greenhouses, home of the Optimara violets was started in 1977 by a German immigrant Reinhold Hotkarnp. He was born and raised in the greenhouse business. The family specialized in African Violets in Germany and he brought his love for the plants to the States. They introduced the first Optimaras in 1978. In hybridizing, the Holtkamp's look for good long lasting bloom and disease resistant plants. They are the largest producers of African Violets in the United States and we all probably started out with an Optimara Violet.

# Timeline of Violet Introductions

- 1926 - Armacost & Royston, Los Angeles, import seed.
- 1935 - Armacost & Royston release first 10 varieties.
- 1939 - First double-blossomed plant appears.
- 1942 - First true pink blossom appears from seed.
- 1943 - First true white blossom appears from seed.
- 1951 - First miniature hybridized by Frank Tinari.
- 1952 - First white-edged blossom appears.
- 1953 - First star blossom (equal size petals) appears.
- 1954 - First pink double hybridized by Lyndon Lyon.
- 1954 - First trailing African violets hybridized by Frank Tinari
- 1957 - "Tommie Lou" variegation appears
- 1960 - Crown variegation appears.
- 1961 - Mosaic variegation appears.
- 1974 - Lyndon Lyon hybridizes first miniature trailer.
- 1983 - First Chimera was registered
- 1992 - First yellow blossomed plants hybridized.