

Why Won't My Violet Bloom?

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Most African violets should be blooming regularly throughout the year. Some varieties will always have one or two flowers open. Some varieties burst into heavier bloom and then rest briefly before bursting into bloom again. A few varieties are more reluctant to bloom except in excellent light, but even these should be blooming once or twice a year. If violets do not bloom, there is usually a problem with the growing conditions.

The Likely Culprit is Light

Violets need bright light to bloom well. If they are window grown, violets should be set within twelve inches of the glass; the window should be fairly large to allow generous light; there should be some light filtering, such as sheer drapes or trees outside. Do be careful of heat, however, since some window areas get quite warm. Temperatures should stay near 72°F. Violets that are not getting enough light will seem to reach upward. Leaves will not lie flat in a perfect circle around the pot. Whenever a grower sees this, efforts should be taken to increase the amount of light the plant receives.

Violets can be given artificial light when no good windows are available, using any kind of fluorescent tubes. Violets should be placed so that the light is just twelve inches above the foliage, and the lights should be turned on for about twelve hours a day. Again, choose a growing area that is about 72 degrees most of the time.

Is It Hungry for Fertilizer?

Often a lack of bloom can be blamed on inadequate fertilizer. Violets need to be fertilized weekly with a good quality fertilizer designed for them. There are many good products on the market. Most growers prefer to use a formula that is mixed in the water and used every time violets are watered. If you choose to use a fertilizer that recommends monthly fertilizing, you can dilute it to use weekly. If directions call for one teaspoon to a gallon of water monthly, simply change it to 1/4 teaspoon to a gallon. Fertilizer is quite stable when mixed up, and can be saved from week to week if it is not all used at once.

Potting Soil Can Prevent Blooms

Blossoms form when roots are healthy and well-developed. Violet roots are very fine and hair-like. If violets are potted in heavy or packed soils, the roots will not develop, and flowering will be sparse. It is hard to purchase good quality pre-mixed violet soil. Most products labeled for violets are using sedge peat which is black and smeary when rubbed between the fingers. Rarely do these commercial potting

mixes have enough ingredients to lighten the soil (such as perlite or vermiculite) for violets to thrive. For many growers, the only solution is to mix it themselves. One commonly used recipe is: 1 part milled sphagnum peat moss, 1 part vermiculite, and 1 part perlite with a bit of charcoal tossed in. The texture is most important. This mix will not pack down even when wet, leaving lots of air passages for roots to grow into. When repotting violets, be especially careful not to press down on the soil or pack it around the roots.

A Few Other Possibilities

Along with preferring the soil to be loose and airy, violets like to be in small pots. Generally, the pots should be four inches deep (or less) and only one-third the size of the leaf span. If your violet is twelve inches across, it should be growing in a pot that is four inches in diameter and four inches deep. When well-developed roots find the walls of their pot, they will often begin heavy flowering. Dry air can cause violet buds to dry off before ever becoming visible to the naked eye. Be sure that there is some humidity around the plant, and avoid drafts from heating or air conditioning. Humidity can be provided with a small open dish of water placed next to the pot. Uneven watering may cause buds to dry off prematurely. Try to keep soil evenly moist all of the time. Avoid allowing your violet to become so dry that leaves wilt, but also avoid allowing your plant to stand in water for more than one-half hour (to avert crown rot problems). Be sure that there is only one crown of leaves growing in the pot. Sometimes violets will form suckers, resulting in multiple crowns or centers of growth. These suckers should be removed into their own pot or destroyed, so that a single crown is left. Most violets do not bloom well when crowded in a pot.

A Silly Tip

Occasionally a grower is doing everything well, and a violet will still stubbornly remain out of bloom while developing beautiful leaves. Botanists would say that it is in a vegetative mode. In order to switch it to a fruiting (flowering) mode, the plant needs a gentle threat that will trigger a "survival of the species" response. Squeezing the sides of the pot or gently thumping the pot on the table surface will disturb roots enough to trigger a panic response, often causing the violet to begin setting flowers. It sounds silly, but there is good science to support this action.



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