

## **KOHLERIAS AND OTHER RHIZOMATOUS PLANTS**

### **Starting Your New Plant**

Make some well drained regular potting mix (half African Violet soil / half perlite) and find a shallower pot than the usual. Layer Styrofoam p-nuts on the bottom for drainage and top with this nice, light soil. Lay your rhizome on the mix and push in an inch or so (not too deep!) . Water (maybe just spritz well at this point) and set aside until you see the green sprout come up. Keep it moist, not wet. If your rhizome is quite large, you can break into two or more pieces. It is best to use a piece one inch long or the entire rhizome if smaller. Some rhizomes can be quite small, others as long as 7 to 8 inches. You may prefer to keep the rhizome in a ziplock bag until you see signs of sprouting so you can center the growing point in the pot. If there is a long enough growth on the rhizome when you get it, you can cut sections off of that and plant them in the pot as well.

### **Growing On**

Your kohlerias will be happiest in a bright sunny window, under 4 fluorescent tubes or, if your climate is suitable, outdoors in a patio pot. Part day or dappled sun would be preferred to direct full day sunshine which could cause the leaves to burn. Kohlerias benefit from frequent pinching to keep them compact and sturdy and to make a bushy plant. If you are planting them outdoors, do remember that these plants are not perennial in North America and must be protected from our cold temperatures. (See Dormancy below) Grown indoors, they are happy in the same type of conditions as your African Violets, except that they appreciate a little more light.

### **Maintenance**

Well, when you weren't looking, all of a sudden your young plant got long and leggy. In fact it won't stand up any more, but wants to sprawl along the shelf basking in the light, and crawling over the neighbors.  
Solution 1: On a day when the plant is fairly dry and in need of watering, remove the plant from its pot and take off all those lower spaced out leaves until you have a nice compact fresh looking crown. Prepare a larger pot with your usual mix at the ready. Holding your plant in your hands, gently bend the stalk over sideways. Usually there is one direction the plant is more willing to go in. Slowly push on the stem gently easing it over. Now slowly turn the root ball in your hand continuing to apply steady but gentle pressure, while winding the stem around the root ball. When you reach the point where your new crown is you can go ahead and pop it into the new pot. If it doesn't want to hold together, a small elastic band works well. Place it in the new pot so the leaves will be just above soil level, fill the pot with soil mix and water well. Voila - a brand new plant looking great. Don't be upset if you hear the stem crack during this operation or even if you know it has a break in it. The plant will simply make more roots at that spot.

Solution 2: For an older plant that has grown too tall for the light stand or is no longer attractive due to a long bare lower stem, use a sharp knife. Cut the top of the plant off cleanly, at a point where you have nice new healthy growth. Remove the lowest one or two sets of leaves, and set in a pot of soil less mix appropriate to the size of the cutting. Water in. If the growth was really long, you may be able to do this several times! Kohlerias are extremely strong and resilient plants. They will usually continue blooming even through this operation, while making a whole new root system. If you are at all nervous, you can simply make a mini greenhouse to help hold in humidity while it roots, by placing a baggie or shower cap over it. Do check the pot for rhizomes before you throw out the tired bottom half of the plant. They are sometimes very hard to see!

### **Dormancy**

Some kohlerias, particularly the species, have a tendency to go dormant. If your plant has started to die back after a long period of blooming, don't despair. Cut back on the watering a little bit and wait until the plant has lost most of its leaves. Remove the old growth to soil level. Now you have two choices.

#1 You can set the pot aside, watering occasionally to keep it barely moist and wait until the plant sends up new growth. As they go into dormancy, just move them to protected place, it doesn't need to be bright. A garage might work. Temp should stay above freezing, at least! Water VERY SPARINGLY during this time, just enough to keep them from drying out entirely.

#2 You can remove it from its pot and mine for gold. You are looking of course for the rhizomes the kohleria makes before going dormant. Collect your rhizome or rhizomes in a ziplock bag with a little damp vermiculite, and set aside in a dark cool place, until you are ready to plant them, or if you prefer you can go ahead and set them in fresh soil without waiting.

### **Experiment with these wonderful plants.**

**The rhizomes give you a built in insurance policy!** 4/21/13