

## Some Streptocarpus Problems:

Generally speaking, streps are harder to kill than are violets, being more tolerant of neglect. This is especially true of the more modern hybrids. There are, however, some potential problems that you may encounter.

1. *Species and many older hybrids.* It is true that these can be intolerant of warm temperatures. A prolonged period of temperatures much above 80°F can be the beginning of the end for some of the species.
2. *Unifoliate and/or "annual" species.* Some of the species are "unifoliate", meaning that they produce only *one* mature leaf. Though not necessarily difficult, these are not recommended for novices--i.e. if the leaf dies, the plant dies. Many other species are "annuals" in that they will bloom, set seed, and then expire. These are best kept growing by continually sowing seed and/or rooting leaves.
3. *Over-watering and/or too dense a soil mix.* This is really the only way one can kill most modern streptocarpus hybrids, and is the most common problem of novice growers. Streps almost always will recover from lack of water, even when almost totally limp, but can be killed by continual over-watering. For this same reason, a lighter soil mix is always preferred over a heavy one.
4. *"Browned or yellowed" leaf tips or margins.* This can be caused by many kinds of stress, but the most common causes are infrequent or improper repotting and/or lack of grooming. Sometimes that leaf is yellow simply because it's old and should be removed! These symptoms may also appear if the strep is very root bound.
5. *Crowded and/or deformed center growth.* Streps are very fast, vigorous growers, and need to be divided and repotted into fresh soil at least every 6 months. When very root bound, especially in very old soil, center growth may show these symptoms. In extreme cases, it can be mistaken for a mite infestation.
6. *Lack of bloom.* This is *rarely* a problem for them. If it does stop blooming, and culture (i.e. feeding, light, etc.) is good, it may be because there is too much "old" growth. Each leaf will produce 6-12 bloom stalks but, after that, will stop producing more buds. Unless there are new, healthy, leaves being produced, blooming will eventually cease. Dividing and repotting, giving the plant a fresh start, usually solves this problem.

## Some suggestions:

Here are a few, simple, "rules of thumb" in growing streps that should increase your chances for success.

1. *Use very light soil mixes.* Especially true if you wick-water or otherwise plan to keep your plants constantly moist. If wicking, use a mix of *at least* 50% coarse perlite (the coarser, the better). It's also a good idea to let the reservoir (wash in hot soapy water before refilling) go dry occasionally before refilling (this goes for violets, too). Keeping too-dense a soil, too wet, is the most common problem growers have. Keep those roots happy!
2. *Use a balanced fertilizer.* "Bloom boosting", or high phosphorus, fertilizers are not necessary for good blooming & can be toxic to streps. If you have healthy roots and leaves, blooms will come. Streps are very vigorous growers and need to be fed regularly and adequately.
3. *Regular grooming and pruning.* Don't be afraid to remove old leaves, especially if they've already produced a number of bloomstalks. Remove leaves that seem to be "competing" for the same space, or getting in each other's way. Remember, also, that leaves can be trimmed with virtually no effect on blooming.
4. *Regular repotting.* If a strep has healthy roots, it's happy. If it doesn't, it won't be. Proper pot size, and fresh soil, are needed for new, healthy, root development. Neglect here is the second most common problem. Be sure to water more sparingly until new roots have begun to grow into the added soil.
5. *Don't overcrowd.* This goes for violets (and all plants) too. Don't create a "jungle-like" environment. Treat them like weeds, and they'll grow and look like weeds.

## Future possibilities (what hybridizers look for in seedlings):

What hybridizers, are looking for are qualities that don't already exist, or need perfecting, and those that make the plant easy to grow. Commercial sellers, also want a plant that will be marketable (what people will buy), propagates and grows quickly, transports well (for shipping), and is unique to all (as opposed to other sellers). Here are some current goals in their breeding programs:

1. Plants that are tolerant of neglect and adverse growing conditions.
2. Small, compact growers preferred. So that they can fit on a windowsill, and more can be fit onto a light garden shelf. Glossy leaves, sometimes with dark and/or red-backing, growing in a flat (not upright) manner, preferably in a rounded (even rosette) form.
3. Long lasting blooms that are stick-tite and will hold up to mailing, transportation to shows, and handling Double, or triple, blossoms are preferred for this reason. So that plants can easily fit onto light stand shelves, short, stiff, bloom stalks, with five or more blooms per stem, are desirable.
4. Unusual colors, like fantasies, multi-colors, netting patterns, more than 5 petals and ruffled edges. The possible colors, and combination of colors, are nearly limitless. Unusual shapes and textures, such as frilled or velvety blooms.
5. Even better, how about variegated leaves and fragrant blooms? Such hybrids are just now making their way into the hobby. They presently leave much to be desired with respect to growing ease and performance, but the possibilities for something really spectacular is there.

Many of these have already been achieved, by US and foreign hybridizers, to a degree. The future of Streptocarpus is very exciting!