

Miniature and Semi Miniature African Violets My Way

By Cathy Carter

What is a Miniature or Semi Miniature African Violet?

Miniature (M) African violets can be 6 inches or less in diameter.

Semi miniature (SM) African violets can be 8 inches or less in diameter. They don't have to be bigger than 6 inches. The hybridizer decides if a plant is M or SM. You can take off the bottom row of leaves sometimes to keep a plant from exceeding the given size for a show. Do not leave a neck showing.

Propagation

Miniature violets can be propagated by planting leaves or suckers, enclosed in a plastic bag to keep the humidity high while they root. Very small suckers can be planted in soil in an egg carton greenhouse enclosed in a plastic bag.

Potting and repotting

Mature miniature African violets should be planted in 2 inch, 2 1/4 inch, or 2 1/2-inch short squatty pots, or in solo cups with about 1/4 inch of gravel or perlite in the bottom. This makes the solo cup act more like a short squatty pot and it helps with drainage if you water by hand. It is also useful to restart the wicking action in a pot that has lost the wick's capillary action.

The biggest pot that a single crowned, rosette-forming semi miniature plant should go into is a 3-inch pot. Trailers can go into a slightly larger, shallow pot as they grow.

Fox Farm Ocean Blend soil contains a lot of added nutrients. This tends to cause minis to grow out a large set of leaves initially with a smaller symmetrical crown which forms later as the nutrients decrease. Pro Mix BX works much better, mixed with 50% perlite suitable for wick watering. **Be sure to keep the lowest leaves 1/8 inch above the soil surface to keep water out of the tiny center of the crown.**

Mature miniature African violets should be repotted every 6 months into clean, **same-sized pots**. Old or damaged leaves should be removed, and the root ball settled lower into the pot to cover any exposed neck. The bottom of the root ball may be trimmed shorter to fit back into the small pot. A "soft repotting" can be done to lower the plant in the pot very gently and fill in a neck before a show without making the plant wilt or go into shock.

A small crown of 2 or 3 rows of leaves should be left when stripping a plant down for "hard repotting". The root ball can be shortened or cut off entirely. The crown and stalk can then be re-rooted in a pot and covered to conserve humidity.. A hard repotting will very often stress the plant and cause it to grow lots of suckers right away. Removing them carefully with a sucker plucker will preserve the symmetry. It will grow out and bloom in about 4 to 5 months (in ideal growing conditions) with warmth from the fluorescent lighting. Cooler areas will take a little longer. The smaller ones grow out for show faster than standard plants. Aim for three to five rows of healthy young leaves.

Water and fertilizer

Small plants do better with very diluted fertilizer. Recommended mixture is 1/8 teaspoon of Dyna Grow (GROW 7-9-5) per gallon of water, which has enough nitrogen (first number) to promote good growth and variegation while not causing over-sized leaves to form. It has enough phosphorus (middle number) to promote bloom since it is a little higher than the nitrogen content. Plants need and use more water than fertilizer in their warm growing spaces under lights. In summer, air conditioning removes humidity and causes more water usage as well. In winter, having the heat on does much the same thing. Do not use more than 1/4 teaspoon of fertilizer per gallon of water on them.

Never use water from a water softener system which contains enough residual salt to damage plants over time as it builds up in the soil.

Bloom boosting fertilizer like 5-50-17 can only be used once 5 - 6 weeks before a show to promote blooming primarily in standard violets. However, it does not have enough nitrogen to keep leaves a healthy green, especially under lights. It is not recommended for minis and semi minis. They do not respond well to this fertilizer.

Light

The same lighting that is used on standard plants works well on minis. Some varieties need more light than others; dark green foliage does very well under the center of fluorescent light tubes and lighter green or variegated foliage does better at the end of the tubes. LED lighting should be the same intensity under the whole length of the fixture, therefore you have to adjust the distance from the bulb to the top of the plants. It's simple to set a difficult plant on something to raise it for more light. Minis also do well on windowsills if protected from the cold and direct sun.

Bloom

Older varieties (vintage varieties) are not as free blooming as most of the newer hybrids. Disbudding minis for 6 –8 weeks before a show can be done with newer varieties (vintage varieties hate this). The excess energy may cause a lot of suckers to form in the leaf axils where you would rather have bloom stalks to form. Remove any suckers that form to preserve the symmetrical growth pattern of the leaves. A hard repotting and the 7-9-5 fertilizer will usually produce a very good bloom as soon as the mini grows out, usually about 4 – 5 months. Seasonal weather and temperature changes indoors will cause variations in time for plants to grow out and have fully open blooms. This process is slower in cooler temperatures.

Grooming for show

Remove all old bloom stalks and dead or fading blooms. Be sure to remove the entire tiny stalk that connects to the bloom stalk. Remove any stubs of bloom stalks in the leaf axils as well. Remove all "baby leaves". The bottom row of leaves should be the largest leaves, with no small or immature leaves beneath them. Consider removing the bottom row of leaves if there is a large marred spot in one or more leaves, but only if it won't ruin the symmetry. Keep in mind that you lose more points from the judges for a symmetry problem or missing leaf/leaves than for you do for one or 2 small, marred spots! Check the plant description (Miniature or Semi-miniature), then you can either measure the diameter of the plant or check it by using embroidery hoops: 6 inch for M and 8 inch for SM. Check online or in AVSA's First Class program to determine if it is blooming true to the description.

Your minis should now be *absolutely beautiful!!*

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