

Micro-miniature and Miniature Sinningias

Sinningias are part of the Gesneriad Family along with African violets, Streptocarpus, Primulinas, Episcias, trailing Columneas and Nematanthus, and many others. Some of the large Sinningias are also known as Florist's Gloxinias.

Some of the members of this Family are fibrous rooted plants, some grow from rhizomes, and the Sinningias are plants that grow from potato-like tubers. Tubers can range from tiny all the way up to the size of baking potatoes, as in Sinningia 'Orange Zinger' and Gloxinias.

My favorites are the micro-miniature and miniature-sized plants. These are becoming popular these days and have attracted some very good hybridizers who are adding wonderful new color combinations to the list of varieties.

My micro- and miniature Sinningias grow under the same lights, temperatures, watering, soil, and fertilizer that work for my African violets.

The soil that I am using now is ProMix Moisture, which does not contain fertilizer, mixed 50/50 with small to medium perlite; when I lived in North Georgia, I used ProMix BH, which did contain fertilizer, but did not work well in Florida with my plants. They seem to use much more water here and need less fertilizer in the heat. The big jolt of fertilizer in the ProMixBX produced a row of much bigger leaves that led to a culture break in leaf size when a plant transitioned to my regular fertilizer schedule. A constant feed program of 1/8 teaspoon of DynaGrow "Grow", 7-9-5, per gallon of water produces a nice sized plant with even rows of leaves toward the crown of the plant. It has enough nitrogen to give a plant a good start and a high enough middle number to produce many blooms when the plant becomes rootbound and blooms.

Instead of city water, I now have well water, which also does not work well with my plants. Watering has been switched to reverse osmosis (RO) water with 1 teaspoon of liquid calcium/magnesium per gallon added to make up for what the RO system removed. The DynaGro has enough of the other minerals to keep a plant happy.

Micro-miniature Sinningias like *S. pusilla* and *S. White Sprite* will grow well in small pots with no wicks in covered containers that increase humidity and keep them from drying out in the blink of an eye. I have discovered that they will also grow well in their small pots on a wick. In some environments, they can be grown on wicks on an open shelf under light, but I find it necessary to put them under a clear dome. The air here is either AC or heat, which seems to be too dry for the tiny plants. Larger M/SM sized Sinningias usually do well on wicks without the dome. Use a wick that is thick enough to not lose capillary action when the plant is rootbound and in full bloom. That is when it will need to draw the maximum water up to support all that foliage and bloom.

Micro-mini Sinningias need repotting about every 6 months. A pair of tweezers with narrow, sharp points is necessary to lift the tuber out of the old medicine cup or pot, to clean out dead leaves and crowns, and carefully pull off some of the old mat of roots around the tuber. Tubers have very thin delicate skin, which can be skinned up very easily and allow rot to set in. Placing a damaged tuber in a nest of perlite in the small pot of soil will help prevent rot. Dale Martens even cuts a large M/SM tuber with more than one sprout on it in half, placing the cut side against wet perlite to heal over!

You can grow a Micro-Sinningia from a top cutting by removing a couple of leaves to make a short section of open stem and plant it in a small cup of soil up to the bottom leaves, no dirt in the crown. *S. pusilla* and *S. White Sprite* will bloom true if grown from seed, as will other wild species. Other varieties that are hybrids will grow from seed but will not usually bloom the same as the seed parent plant. The tiny plants will look like moss in the pot when they sprout. Carefully lift each with the tip of the tweezers or a toothpick into its own medicine cup of soil as soon as it is big enough to handle. The disturbance and having its own pot will speed up the growth rate.

I do not try to keep Sinningias on a "Growing to Show" schedule. The Dale Martens video with the link in our meeting reminder email has some suggestions for doing this. Experiment ahead of time to see how long it takes in your conditions for a repotted or planted top to recover and be full of bloom. It can vary considerably depending on the time of year and your growing conditions.