Critters and Colors in the Garden

By Gary Welchman

A trip to the garden is the beginning of a small journey. I become quiet on the inside and realize the sounds not made by myself will be from the many birds and insects to be found in that area. The colors from the plants themselves.

This time of quiet is marked by listening and feeling, of meditation or reflection. There are sounds from birds, bees, insects and the wind that generate a certain music one has come to expect from nature. From the cry of the red tailed hawk to the warble of a songbird, the tenor note from a frog in the marsh grass or the scowling chatter of squirrels from the nearby woodlot. All are a welcome respite from the labors at hand.

For gardeners to embrace this subject please note the group is inclusive of beneficial critters only. Songbirds for their sounds and insect control, bees for their sounds and pollinating tasks. Monarch butterflies for their beauty. I might also include ladybugs - both red and orange - for the colors they bring to this garden world. I realize birds like to eat fruit and that's not welcome but hopefully the nets will keep the birds away.

Growing African Violets

By Sarah Housley

African Violets are one of my favorite flowers. I'm sure that not many would have guessed that judging by the state of my office, where 13 of these green beauties reside along the shelves counters and windowills. The blooms are lush colorful bouquets with a wide range of color and patterns, and are simply breath-taking.

Despite their beauty many think that these flowers are difficult and unforgiving. They are actually quite the opposite. Once you understand their basic demands you can come to realize how simple and honestly forgiving an African violet is.

There are 3 main rules to growing African Violets. Rule number 1, don’t over water. These plants are on a strict “water only when needed” schedule. After time you will figure out how much and how often to water them and be able to put them on a regular schedule but when first starting out learn its patterns. And if you are too
impatient for that, remember if wilted and soil is dry to the touch then it needs water. Overwatering is a major problem when it comes to beginners. If wilted and soil is wet or damp to the touch you may be drowning your plant. Don’t panic. If you will pour out any standing water and then let soil dry. Some leaves may stay wilted and eventually turn brown and die but don’t fret. The plant will live and resume its growth and in time will be just as full and beautiful.

Rule number 2 deals with placement of your plant. For the best growth and maximum beauty find a bright window that doesn’t get direct sunlight. That means if the sun shines directly in that window then it isn’t where your violet should go, direct sunlight will bleach and burn the leaves. African violets enjoy bright indirect light. The plants are a little more forgiving with this rule. If the window in a room won’t work or gets too much direct light move the plant further into the room. A room with less light will still work but the plant will compensate for the lack of adequate light and may not bloom as profusely or grow as large. Don’t panic if when you first move your plant it goes through a period of adjustment. African violets are not fond of being moved around. Once you find a place for it, leave it there to adjust and it will resume growing.

Rule number 3. Feed that thing! African violets require a lot of nutrients. When transplanting them make sure your soil has plenty of sterilized organic material (I like to use broken down tree and plant matter that I have either microwaved or baked in the oven until sterile mixed in with whatever soil I have on hand or store bought violet potting soil). After getting the needs in soil met then you still have to feed the monster. African violets require a regular dosage of violet food to be able to have the nutrients to flourish and bloom in the best possible way. A basic violet food from miracle grow does the trick! I personally add several drops of Miracle Grow African Violet Plant food to my water every time I water to be able to get the best blooms out of my plants. This is the one thing I tell people to do when they come to me and say they have violets that grow but don’t bloom. It usually solves the problem.

Here are a few more helpful tips for growing African violets:

- If you are not good at keeping track of when to water your violets invest in self watering pots. They help keep your violet from getting over watered.
- Break off discolored or dying leaves so the plant doesn’t use its nutrients keeping them alive.
- When rooting a broken off leaf make sure the base of the leave is broken clean. Jagged breaks will not root well.
- If needing to transplant a plant, let it wilt first so there is minimal damage to the plant. If you try to transplant a plant that has already been watered you will end up causing damage and leaf loss.
- If new to violets look for varieties that are more forgiving. Certain hybrids are much more demanding and picky.
- If the violet starts to grow crooked just swivel the pot around so that the plant will follow the light back the other direction and straiten its self out. Rotating the violets periodically will keep them growing strait and help keep the foliage growing even.
- If your violet is older and has a long stalk between the leaves and dirt repot the plant and fill with dirt until right under the leaves. The stalk will grow roots and help your plant stay healthy.
- If you are providing everything the plant needs, sometimes “suckers” will grow from roots or stalk. If you don’t want another plant break it off and dispose. If you don’t mind another plant carefully break off sucker at the base and put in water so that it can grow roots without taking away from the mother plant. It will root just like one of the leaves and you will have a duplicate plant.
- Keep Leaves dry. If you wet the leaves while watering relatedly it can cause leaf diseases and discoloring.
Favorite Seeds List

Every Garden Spot is different. Plants that produce in one area, may not grow and produce in another. A soil test to determine the soil nutrients will give the gardener a head start on what is needed to produce good vegetables. The list below are vegetables that are easy to start from seeds, in early spring to be transplanted in the garden, after the frost date April 21st.

Broccoli
Bay meadow
Packman
Gypsy
Premium
Comet

Tomatoes
Sun King
Skyway (Hybrid)
Charger (Hybrid)
Peron
Legend
Celebrity (Hybrid)

Heirloom
Brandy wine
Mortgage Lifter
Arkansas Traveler

Bell Peppers
King of North
Keystone
King Arthur
Red Knight

Early Spring

Tomatoes
Skyway (Hybrid)
Charger (Hybrid)
Peron
Legend
Celebrity (Hybrid)

Heirloom
Brandy wine
Mortgage Lifter
Arkansas Traveler

Bell Peppers
King of North
Keystone
King Arthur
Red Knight

The Next List can be planted in the garden after the frost date usually around April 21st.

Early Spring

Tomatoes
Skyway (Hybrid)
Charger (Hybrid)
Peron
Legend
Celebrity (Hybrid)

Heirloom
Brandy wine
Mortgage Lifter
Arkansas Traveler

Bell Peppers
King of North
Keystone
King Arthur
Red Knight

May

Corn Bicolor
Johnny’s Hybrid Bicolor (Sh2)
SS2742 F1 TRTD
Wxtra Tender 2171 TRTD
Hybrid Bicolor SH2

Beans
Velour Bush
Pole-Kentucky Wonder
Blue Lake
Rattle Snake

Warm Soil Approximately 70-80 degrees

Okra
Clemson Spineless
So Experiment with different seeds and find the ones that thrive in your garden.

Favorite Veggies from the Garden

One of my favorite varieties of eggplants is 'India Paint.' The plant has a bushy growth habit that provides round baseball-shaped fruits. The eggplants are striped white and purple with a thin flesh, and boast a sweet flavor when picked early. They taste best when they are about the size of a beefsteak tomato. Best of all, they bear prolifically; meaning you will have plenty to share with friends.

They can be grown from seed; although I prefer to order plants. I buy them from "Cook's Garden" catalog, which can be pricey. However, the plants always arrive in great condition and at the appropriate time for planting.

Another interesting vegetable variety is the 'Piccolo' Zucchini. You may think you have seen more than your share of zucchini; however, 'Piccolo' is a special treat. A bush variety, it bears smallish oval fruits that look remarkably like miniature watermelons. Their flavor is mild, and the flesh is tender, especially when 4" in size. Several of my friends have exclaimed over their flavor and appearance. They can be sliced or hollowed out and stuffed, much like a bell pepper.

BUT Beware! Just like any squash variety, if you turn your back on them, they will triple in size overnight!

I purchase my 'Piccolo' seeds from "Territorial Seed Company," although they may be available from other sources. My experience is that they have an excellent germination rate whether planted in pots or directly seeded into the garden.

By Suzie McCormick

By Laura Clark
WELCOME TO MEMBERS

Marilee Bachmann
Andie Hession
Lacy Cornell
David and Laura Timby
Laura Clark
Edna Mae Wells
Suzie McCormick
Gary Welchman

You are invited to be a guest at one of our Master Gardener meetings at the Searcy County Extension Office on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m.

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A soil test gives an estimate of the supply of plant food elements in the soil and shows if the soil is in the correct pH range (too acid or too alkaline). Each test is accompanied by soil test recommendations, which detail plant food needed at planting or green-up and lime needed to offset harmful soil acidity.

Before taking soil samples, draw a sketch showing the different lawn/garden areas and then number each area. Areas around shrubs should be sampled separately from turf. If you have a large lawn or garden, sample areas separately that have been, or will be, managed differently. When collecting soil, gently rake aside mulch or surface litter like straw, leaves and old stalks. Take soil with a soil probe or shovel from at least 12 samples in each area to obtain a representative sample. A zigzag sampling pattern is preferred. Take samples in gardens, lawns, and around shrubs to a depth of about 4 inches and mature fruit trees at a depth of 12 inches. At each stop, place a small core or strip of soil in a clean bucket or paper bag. Mix soil thoroughly. Discard rocks, gravels and roots. Before filling the sample box, allow the soil sample to air dry by spreading it on a clean surface in the open, such as on newspapers or large paper bags on a countertop or workbench. Do not heat the sample in an oven to speed drying. Remove one pint for the laboratory sample. Label with the area name. Be sure to completely fill the pint container (containers can be obtained from your local Extension office). Bring samples to your county Extension agent’s office to send to the laboratory. Be prepared to give a short history of each field. A good sample with accurate information will result in a good recommendation. Remember, fertilizer and lime recommendations are no better than the sample taken.

Your soil tests can serve as a guide for fertilizer practices for the next three or four years. If you have tests over four years old, take samples again for up to date recommendations. If using intensive management or producing several crops per year, consider taking samples yearly. For information on understanding the numbers on your soil test report, ask your county agent for a copy of FSA2118, Understanding the Numbers on Your Soil Test Report.