



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from chapter newsletters,
our journal **Gesneriads**, and original sources)

Volume 7, Number 3

March 2016



Welcome to the latest issue of **Gleanings**! This issue includes photos from the Desert Sun African Violet and Gesneriad Society Show, Paul Susi describing how he grows *Petrocosmeas*, information about the next webinar, and news about *Sinningia minima* and *Sinningia braggae*.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**!

Mel Grice, Editor



These two photos are of my plant of *Sinningia bullata* x *S. tubiflora*, an F₁ hybrid created by Dave Zaitlin. This is the second time that it has bloomed for me. The first time the lower leaves grew to be 24 inches across. This time I grew it under stronger light and it is much more compact (12 inches across) and more floriferous. It is definitely a "keeper."

Mel



Desert Sun African Violet & Gesneriad Society Show



Officers and Directors of The Gesneriad Society dropped in on the Desert Sun African Violet and Gesneriad Society chapter show. Front row, left to right — Dee Stewart, Carolyn Ripps, Gussie Farrice, Susan Grose, Laura Buckner, Anne Vidaver, Karyn Cichocki, Sally Robinson, Betsy Gottshall, Peter Shalit, Winston Goretsky. Back row, left to right — Julie Mavity-Hudson, Mel Grice, Stephen Maciejewski, Bob Stewart, Mary Schaeffer, Stuart Hammer, Paul Susi, Jeanne Katzenstein, Paulo Castello da Costa, Bob Clark.



Saintpaulia 'Rebel's Valiant'
Barbara Reith

Mel Grice photos



Episcia 'Cleopatra'
Susan Kim



Aeschynanthus 'Coral Flame'
Allan Reith



Kohleria 'Peridots Rolo'
Candace Baldwin



Columnnea 'Bonfire' - Dariane Joshlin



Saintpaulia 8 clone Cha Simba - Candace Baldwin



Saintpaulia 'Irish Flirt'
Thelma Heinrich



Sinningia 'Prudence Risley'
Lisa Davidson



Sinningia pusilla
Susan Kim



"Arizona Tribes"
Candace Baldwin

How I Grow *Petrocosmeas*

Paul Susi psusi11@gmail.com
South Huntington, New York, USA

For the longest time in my gesneriad growing, I was unable to grow the plant that decorates a rock (petro = rock; cosmea = decorate). They simply refused to decorate my light stand! They would just sit there, grow a bit, and then die. *Petrocosmea flaccida* was the first one I tried to grow, with continual lack of success. What was I doing wrong?

Then I started listening to what Tim Tuttle was saying about petrocosmeas. Tim, as many of you may know, has done quite a lot of research regarding what makes petrocosmeas bloom, how they should be grown, what type of light they require, and so forth. In addition, he has done a fair amount of hybridizing with petrocosmeas (many of his hybrids carry the alpha name "Keystone's"). Tim's first hybrid was *Petrocosmea* 'Rosemary Platz' in 2008. I realized early on that I was doing a few things wrong. My mix was too heavy and there was too much of it. Also, they didn't need all the light I had been giving them. Not only did I change these three aspects of my petrocosmea culture, but I decided to do a little experimenting on my own. What follows are some of the things I do to grow and flower petrocosmeas. Keep in mind that you may not always have perfectly symmetrical plants (which seem to be the ideal) but you may indeed wind up with plants that are covered with bloom.

Mix and Potting

Since I grow all my gesneriads on capillary matting, the mix I use needs to be light. It turns out that petrocosmeas require an even lighter mix, which I achieve by adding extra perlite and vermiculite to my (approximately) 1:1:1 mix (usually a commercial mix, to which I also add a bit of dolomitic lime). There is so much perlite that I have to make sure to use top dressing for shows, or I will receive the dreaded "Soil surface is distracting" comment! Petrocosmeas do not require much mix when they are potted up since they have shallow roots. What I usually do is place a layer of small aquarium gravel at the bottom of a shallow pot (after using a layer of paper towel to block the drainage holes) — about 1/3 of the pot is gravel. Then comes the mix and the plant. I try to have the root ball touching the gravel, since the goal is to mimic the natural growing conditions — decorating a rock and not buried in mix.

Temperature, Water and Light

Petrocosmeas grow in shady, moist environments at about 1200 to 3000 feet in southern China and northern Vietnam. Yes, that means cool, but not cold. When I visited southern China in 2014, we were told that temperatures could reach the upper 80s during the summer and close to, or below freezing, during the winter. The temperature in my basement (where the petrocosmeas are grown) ranges from a low of approximately 55°F in the winter to a high of 85°F in the summer, with no negative effects on the plants. The capillary matting is watered when it is still damp and sometimes when it gets completely dry, so the petrocosmeas do stay moist most of the time. Although I grow under T8 tubes, I use only two tubes on the petrocosmea shelf. The tubes are approximately 12" above the tops of the plants.

Flowering

Many growers have commented on the need for a cold spell to encourage petrocosmeas to set bloom and flower. However, I have not found this to be the case. My plants begin blooming at the



Left: Paul's petrocosmea shelf



Right: Paul's *Petrocosmea cavaleriei*

end of summer (when temperatures do not get lower than 70° F in the basement). It could be that just a slight drop from the warmer temperatures of summer is the reason for bloom.

I do, however, grow all the petrocosmeas on the lowest shelf, where it is most likely a few degrees cooler than on the upper shelves. Since I haven't performed any controlled experiments, I don't know what the main factor is. I do know that it is not fertilizer, since I am not at all consistent with fertilizing. I fertilize maybe two or three times a year, half strength, with tomato fertilizer, and wet the mats with the fertilizer water.

Experiments

My primary experiment involves dramatically changing how petrocosmeas are potted up. I now grow a number of them in 4" clay saucers, which are placed directly on the capillary matting. There is very little mix in the shallow saucer and the rootball of the plant is surrounded by aquarium gravel. I have had great success in growing flat symmetrical petrocosmeas this way and also blooming plants. When a small plant is first placed in the saucer, it is important to keep an eye on the condition of the soil, since it will have a tendency to dry out (capillary action seems slow at this point). This led me to my second experiment — watering the plants in the saucers

from the top by pouring small amounts of water over the leaves and the mix. There was no apparent damage to the leaves and the saucer remained moist. As the plant grows in diameter, the mix in the saucer will remain moist and top watering will no longer be necessary. The one drawback to this method of growing is making sure that you don't lose your label!

I think that everyone should try their hand at growing petrocosmeas. Apartment growers especially should not be put off by temperature or humidity requirements. They are not as challenging as one might be led to believe and a petrocosmea with a full head of bloom is a beautiful sight.

Reprinted with permission from *Gesneriad Tips'n Trivia*, The newsletter of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum Gesneriad Society, Vol 39, No 8, December 2015, Karyn Cichocki, editor.

Gesneriad Society Webinar Information

Each webinar (live or anytime) will cost \$9.95 and may be ordered at <http://shop.gesneriadsociety.org>

Information for Live Webinars:

All live webinars will begin at 9 p.m. ET (or, 8 p.m. CT, 7 p.m. MT and 6 p.m. PT). Orders received within 24 hours of the event may not be able to be accommodated and the person will be advised as to options. The viewing link will be sent within 24 hours of the presentation time, and a reminder email will be sent one hour before the presentation. Please note that, while you can have as many people as you want in the room listening, you cannot share your link with others. At the live webinar you will be able to ask questions.

Information for Anytime Webinars:

If you missed webinars on streptocarpus, episcias, miniature sinningias and primulinas, you can still see them!

Anytime webinars will be available the day after the live webinar. The viewing link will be sent within 48 hours of placement of the order. Please note that while you can have as many people as you want in the room listening, you cannot share your link with others. You will not be able to ask questions. The anytime webinar will be available for up to three months following the live webinar.

April 5, 2016

Meet the Gesneriad Family (Dale Martens)

Although many are familiar with African violets, the gesneriad family contains over 3,400 species of plants and countless hybrids. These include plants such as the Florist Gloxinia (*Sinningia speciosa*), lipstick plant (*Aeschynanthus*), goldfish plant (*Nematanthus*), cape primrose (*Streptocarpus*), flame violet (*Episcia*), Cupid's Bower (*Achimenes*), and many others. Join us to see beautiful photos and learn how you can grow them!

<http://shop.gesneriadsociety.org/collections/frontpage/products/webinar-meet-the-gesneriad-family-live>

***Sinningia minima* newly discovered**



Sinningia minima is even smaller than *S. pusilla*. This species grows on iron rocks with its tiny tubers embedded in a crack. Although it grows in Amazonian region of Brazil, the habitat has a definite dry/wet season and the plant stays dormant at least six months.

It was published on Sept 14, 2015 as ***Sinningia minima*** A.O.Araujo & Chautems.

New Name for *Sinningia* sp. "Ibitioca"

If you are growing this beautiful species, please change your labels. It has been recently published as *Sinningia bragae*, in honor of its discoverer, Prof. João Marcelo Braga.

But doesn't it already have a name, "Ibitioca"? Note that "Ibitioca" is in double quotes, but it is preceded by "sp." indicating that it is a species. Newly discovered plants are often given a temporary name to distinguish them until taxonomists can determine where they belong in the grand organization of plants. Generally for sinningias, this has been the place they were originally found.

Chautems, A., M. Peixoto & J. Rossini (2015). A new species of *Sinningia* Nees (Gesneriaceae) from Espírito Santo and Rio de Janeiro states, Brazil. *Candollea* 70(2): 231–235. In English, English abstract. (<http://www.bioone.org/toc/cand/70/2>)



Mauro Peixoto photo



From the editor —

I have just returned from the Philadelphia Flower Show and saw many well-grown gesneriads there. Look for photos in the next issue. I will also be attending many other spring shows — so maybe I will see you there?

If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at melsgrice@earthlink.net

Mel

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Application for Membership — *The Gesneriad Society, Inc.*

WELCOME — membership in our international society includes quarterly issues of *Gesneriads* — *The Journal for Gesneriad Growers*, a copy of *How to Know and Grow Gesneriads*, a packet of gesneriad seeds and a wealth of information about our chapters, flower shows, publications, research, programs and seed fund. Membership begins upon receipt of dues.

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