# NEWSVIEWS

Winter 2010

21(2010) No.2
Editors' Newsletter, THE GESNERIAD SOCIETY

## *Seemannia* by John Boggan *from Petal Tones 41(2010)No.7, Jim Roberts, Ed.*

*Seemannia* is a South American genus of Gesneriaceae consisting of only four species of scaly rhizomatous herbs with brightly colored red, purple, pink, orange, or rarely yellow flowers. The genus was established in 1855 and was recognized by botanists until the 1970's, when Hans Wiehler lumped all of the *Seemannia* species into the genus *Gloxinia* after producing fertile hybrids between *Gloxinia perennis* and some of the *Seemannia* species. Subsequent research has confirmed a close relationship between *Gloxinia* and *Seemannia*, but also revealed that *Koellikeria erinoides* and *Anodiscus xanthophyllus* were even more closely related to *Gloxinia perennis* than were the former *Seemannia* species. In part because of these newly discovered relationships, and in part because the *Seemannia* group is so distinctive, the genus has been resurrected and is now considered distinct from *Gloxinia*. However, in the horticultural trade the species are often still listed under *Gloxinia*. All of the *Seemannia* species are worth growing, and in addition to indoor culture they make excellent container and bedding plants outdoors. Cultural requirements are similar for all the species: bright or dappled shade and a rich, well-drained soil that is neither too wet nor too dry. They overwinter as dormant scaly rhizomes, which are best kept dry to prevent molding and premature sprouting. In the right conditions some may be hardy to zone 7b, or perhaps even colder regions in a sheltered location and with some protection.

One interesting characteristic of this genus is that the plants produce multitudes of long, skinny "stringy rhizomes". During the growing season these produce new plants at the tips, and towards the end of the growing season they produce tiny scaly rhizomes in addition to much larger scaly rhizomes underground. All of the species are interfertile, and will also form partially fertile hybrids with *Gloxinia perennis* to form the hybrid genus x*Gloximannia*. With our new understanding of the relationships between the species of these two genera, crosses with the former *Koelllikeria* (now *Gloxinia*) *erinoides* and (now *Gloxinia*) *xanthophyllus* should be attempted.

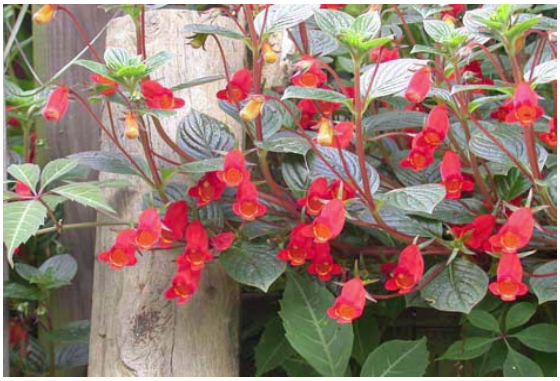
***Seemannia sylvatica*** is the most commonly cultivated species. It is a wide-ranging and variable species and

has been described under a variety of different names. One of the more persistent is *Seemannia latifolia*, a name still sometimes found in the horticultural literature and trade. The species is primarily Andean and ranges from southern Ecuador through Peru to Bolivia, with outlying populations in Paraguay and southern Brazil. The flowers are red or orange, rarely yellow. The plants tend to bloom in late fall and winter, making them a good outdoor plant in frost-free parts of Florida (where they grow and bloom spectacularly in full sun) but mostly unsuitable for outdoor growing in colder climates. The meaning of the name is unclear; it could mean "wild" or "of the forest" but the original description provides no hints.

***Seemannia nematanthodes*** comes from Bolivia and northern Argentina and is superficially similar to *S. syl-*

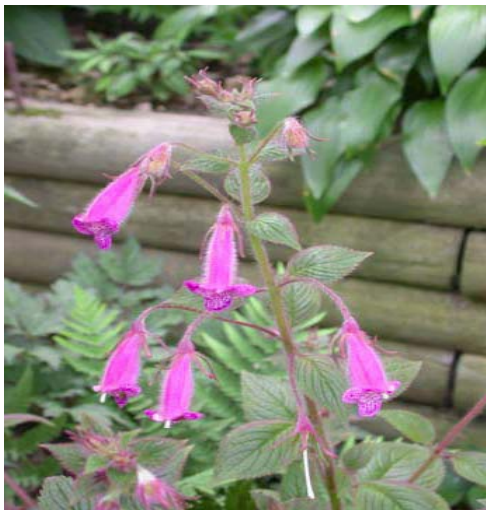
## *Seemannia* *continued from page 1*

*vatica* in having bright orange-red flowers but the plants are more sprawling and begin to bloom in early to mid summer and into the fall. This makes them excellent container and bedding plants, and they are popular with hummingbirds. The flowers are produced on long thin pedicels, possibly accounting for the name, which means *Nematanthus*-like". This species does best when given direct sun for part of the day,



preferably in the morning or very late afternoon; direct midday sun will scorch the leaves. A recent collection from Argentina has been given the cultivar name 'Evita' by Plant Delights Nursery, and is described as being hardy to zone 7b.

***Seemannia gymnostoma*** comes from northern Argentina, southern Peru, and Bolivia. The purple flowers are very unlike those of the other species; in fact



at one time this species was included in the genus *Achimenes*. Also unlike the other species the flowers have a relatively large limb with distinct purple spots. The leaves are softly hairy with distinctly scalloped edges. The name means "naked mouth" although the origin of this name is unclear; the mouth has distinct trichomes much like those of the other species.

***Seemannia purpurascens*** is another variable species. The plants are tall-growing and somewhat weedy in appearance, with lavender, pink or magenta flowers that have a contrasting bright green limb. The leaves are usually bright green but occasional individuals have very dark leaves with reddish-purple undersides; the species name was based on one such individual, hence the name. The species is common in Bolivia, less so in southern Peru. There are also widely separated populations in northern South America (Guyana, French Guiana and northern Brazil) that some botanists believe represent a closely related but still-unnamed species. The dark-leafed selections are the most attractive, and develop their best color in relatively deep shade. A plant distributed as this species but with brilliant orange-red flowers with a contrasting dark purple limb, collected on a Gesneriad Research Foundation expedition to Bolivia in 1996 (GRF 9670), is probably a natural hybrid, possibly between S. purpurscens and S. gymnostoma. My own hybrid, *S. purpurascens* 'Purple Prince', is a selected seedling froma cross between two wild collections of the species; the leaves are very dark and contrast nicely with the pink flowers, which are produced from late summer until frost.



From the Vancouver African Violet & Gesneriad Society's education series, compiled by Arleen Dewell and Ian James.

# CHIRITA: An Introduction

Chirita is a large Old World genus distributed throughout much of Asia. It ranges from Sri Lanka and India eastward through Nepal into China and Southeast Asia down the Malay Peninsula and onto the southern islands of Sumatra, Java and Borneo. Originally based on a small collection of Himalayan herbs, Chirita was first described in 1822.

The genus is comprised of shrubby or soft-stemmed herbs which are either perennial or annual in nature. They are terrestrial or rupicolous and can be found growing in filtered light often on limestone cliffs or rocky hillsides.

Chiritas have beautiful flowers ranging from shades of purple to white and yellow. This, along with their ease of culture and the recent introduction of new species and hybrids has led to their ever increasing popularity.

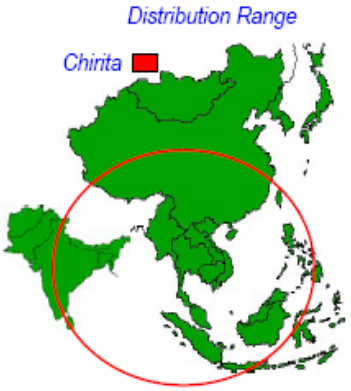
## CLASSIFICATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Family: | GESNERIACEAE |
| Subfamily: | CYRTANDROIDEAE |
| Tribe: | DIDYMOCARPEAE |
| Genus: | CHIRITA |
| Sub-genera: | None, however, the genus is taxonomically divided into three sections: Chirita, Gibbosaccus, and Microchirita. Divisions are based on growth habits and other morphological (structural) characteristics. (A very general discussion of the three sections follows below.) |
| No. of Species: | 140+. |
| Type Species: | The genus was initially described in 1822 by David Don, however, it wasn't until 1954 that B.L. Burtt actually described the type species Chirita urticifolia. |
| Distribution Range: | Indian subcontinent and southeastern Asia. |
| Name Derivation: | Selected by David Don, the name is derived from the vernacular name of one of the species. |
| Root Structure: | Fibrous. |
| Growth Habit: | Caulescent (with a stem) and acaulescent (without a stem). |
| Chromosone Count: | Depending upon the taxonomic subdivision: 4, 9, 10, 14, 16, 17, and 18. |

## CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| Temperature: | Cool to moderately warm growing - 55 to 80 degrees F or 12 to 25 degrees C. |
| Watering: | Bottom or top, with the potting mixture generally allowed to dry out between waterings. |

C. 'Aiko'




C. eburnea

C. sinensis 'Hisako'

C. sclerophylla

C. 'Keiko'

Light: Low to medium light.

Humidity: 40 to 50 percent.

# CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS Cont'd

Fertilizer: Continually with a non-urea based formulation, e.g., Dyna Gro 7-9-5.

Soil: Neutral, heading upward to slightly alkaline; pH=6-7; Basic Potting Mixture (BPM) with the addition of dolomitic lime is appropriate.

Propagation: Asexually using leaves, crowns and suckers or sexually (seed) through self or cross pollination. Hybrid plant material will only reproduce true using asexual propagation methods and techniques.

C. lutea

# TAXONOMIC DIVISIONS

As discussed previously, the genus Chirita is taxonomically divided into three groups: microchirita, gibbosaccus and chirita. These divisions are based on differences in growth habit and morphological characters.

C. sinensis

## SECTION: MICROCHIRITA

This section contains approximately 20 species which are either soft-stemmed caulescent annuals or short-lived perennials. The best known species within this group are C. lavandulacea and C. micromusa. The name, microchirita, refers to the group's flowers having small calyx lobes. Microchirita are primarily tropical, being predominantly located in southeast Asia and the Malay Peninsula. The chromosome counts for this section are 9, 17, and 18.

C. heterotricha

## SECTION: GIBBOSACCUS

This section contains approximately 80 species, all of which form acaulescent rosettes. Many of the species contained in this section are cold-tolerant, e.g., C. fimbrisepala and C. subrhomboidea. The best known species within this group are C. sinensis, C. lutea, and C. linearifolia. The name, gibbosaccus, means "swollen pouch" and refers specifically to the flower structure of C. sinensis (i.e., its corolla base shape). Gibbosaccus have a chromosome count of 18 and are re stricted to locales in southern China and northern Vietnam. This section can be formally broken down into four sub-groups of related species: C. sinensis group, C. pteropoda group, C. linearifolia group, and a "miscellaneous group" of four species (C. fimbrisepala, C. sclerophylla, C. subrhomboidea, and C. tribracteata).

C. fimbrisepala

## SECTION: CHIRITA

This section contains about 45 species. Although the majority of species within this section are caulescent perennial shrubs, some species are small annuals produc ing only one or two leaves in a growing season. Chirita species asperifolia, brigg sioides, walkerae, and moonii are the best known of this group. Members of the Chirita section have chromosome numbers of 4, 9, 10, 14, 16 and 17. With species indigenous to Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and southern China, this group has the widest geographic range of the three sections.

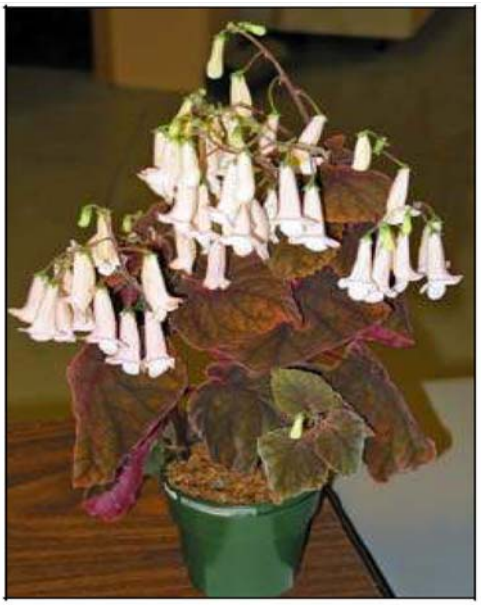
# RECOMMENDED READING

An excellent article called "The Cultivated Species of Chirita" by Dr. J. Boggan (Smithsonian Institute), published in The Gloxinian, 2nd Quarter 1998 (Vol. 48, No. 2).

# Smithianthas

Monte Watler

*Ed: Reprinted from the Toronto Gesneriad Society Newsletter Vol. 14, No 10, December 1990 and has been expanded and edited for content*
*From: TGS Newsletter 33(2009) No.7, Stan Sudol, Ed.*



*Smithiantha* 'Sonata' Daphne Yaremko

Not only are Smithianthas b e a u t i f u l bloomers but they also possess very attractive foliage. B e a u t i f u l l y shaped leaves with a great variety of colour. Scalloped and quite velvety leaves are often interwoven with c o n t r a s t i n g colours of green or maroon giving each leaf a carpet like appearance. It is equally satisfying to grow them for their foliage as it is for their very generous amounts of bell-shaped flowers which they produce. The flower structure has earned them the common name "Temple Bells."

Smithiantha was named in 1891 to honour Miss Matilda Smith, an artist at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew.

The plant itself is quite erect and unlike the Kohleria is not inclined to fall all over the place. It is a rhizomatous plant, but need not go into a complete dormancy. It will continue to grow and branch if it is cut back. The tip cuttings are very easily propagated, and will produce blossoms while they are still quite small.

The plants originated from Mexico. There are currently six species.

*S. aurantiaca* has golden orange flowers with green leaves red hairs?
*S. canarina* has beautiful canary yellow flowers
*S. cinnabarina* is quite a hairy plant with leaves that are a mixture of maroon and green.
*S. laui* has lavender- purple flowers
*S. multiflora* has creamy white flowers and dark green leaves
*S. zebrina* has dark velvet leaves with purplish brown
colouring.

Smithianthas can be grown from seed. Sometimes small seedlings put forth a few blooms, but the best will come the following growth cycle.

Currently the Gesneriad Society Seed Fund has the following listed:

| Species | Hybrids |
|---|---|
| • canarina GRF9105 | • 'Little One' |
| • multiflora GRF9121 | • hybrid mix |
| • multiflora GRF9122 | all are in short supply |
| • zebrina GRF9104 | |

*Smithiantha* 'Little One' Marina De Souza

*Smithiantha* 'Golden Leopard' Bev Williams

Dale Martens in an email to Gesneriphiles writes about sowing a few scales from a rhizome. She found that the scales sprout within three weeks and bloom in 5-6 months. Something else to try.

The Gesneriad Reference web has pictures of ten Smithiantha hybrids, but there are a lot more and some of these may become available in time.

Smithianthas should be potted in a loose mixture to which some extra lime has been added. They are heavy feeders, but will blossom even under low light conditions, but are at their best when given bright light.

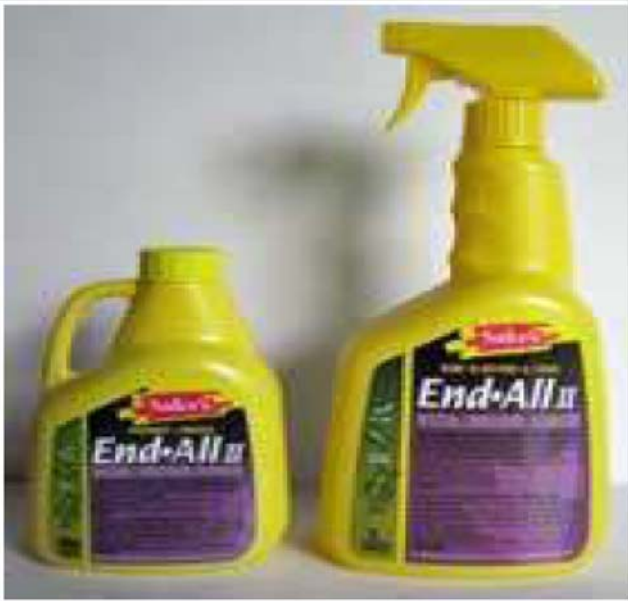
Smithiantha is a showy genus, and a few should be tried by everyone. Try some. You'll like them!

Ref: The Gloxinian Vol.51 No 3, 3rd qtr 2001

# End All II" – The End to All Thrips by Emma Bygott

**from the Toronto Gesneriad Society Newsletter (2010) Oct., Stan Sudol, Ed.**

It is so discouraging to go into the plant room, and while looking over and enjoying all the lovely blooms, to see a dreaded thrips wandering around a bloom. I've done the disbudding, spraying with Conserve and Avid and haven't been able to rid the plant room of the thrips. They seem to be gone and then show up again. I learned about something new from Bill Price when I was at the New York State convention last year, 2009, and thought it sounded like something I should try.




It is a different method of treatment. It is a product called "**End All II**" and you can buy it in a ready to use spray or a concentrate that you mix yourself. You can use it as a spray as you do with the Conserve and Avid if you have a few thrips. If you have a larger infestation of thrips the following method is the better treatment to use. Something to note, **it will damage blossoms**. You can also dip the plant, which is the different method than we've known before. It does use a lot of the concentrate for dipping. The label on the bottle is correct, so use it as stated on the label.

The best time to do the dipping is when you are planning to do the repotting of your plants. That is a good time to do it as the plants are easier to handle when they are stripped back and are therefore smaller. First strip the plants back to what you would normally do when planning to repot. Once you have stripped back your collection you are ready to go. Mix up a bucket of the "End All II" concentrate following the directions on the bottle. Using plastic gloves and a mask is recommended as it can irritate your skin. Take a plant and hold the pot with your fingers over the top of the soil and under the plant leaves to keep the plant and the soil in. Turn the pot upside down and dip the plant itself entirely into, and then back out of the mixture. Next turn the pot right side up again, still holding it the same, and dip just the pot itself completely into the bucket, submerging it, and **hold it there for about a minute** to allow the solution to penetrate the soil then take it out. Once that is done let the pot sit and drain for approximately 20 minutes. The last step is to then rinse the plant with clear water, flushing the "End All II" out of the soil. **It is important to do this after each application**. That last step I didn't do as I didn't realize I had to do that step. Unfortunately I did lose some of my plants as a result. So be sure to rinse after the dipping, even though you are going to repot.

You need to do this dipping process three times with a week in between each treatment. Then you can repot the plants.

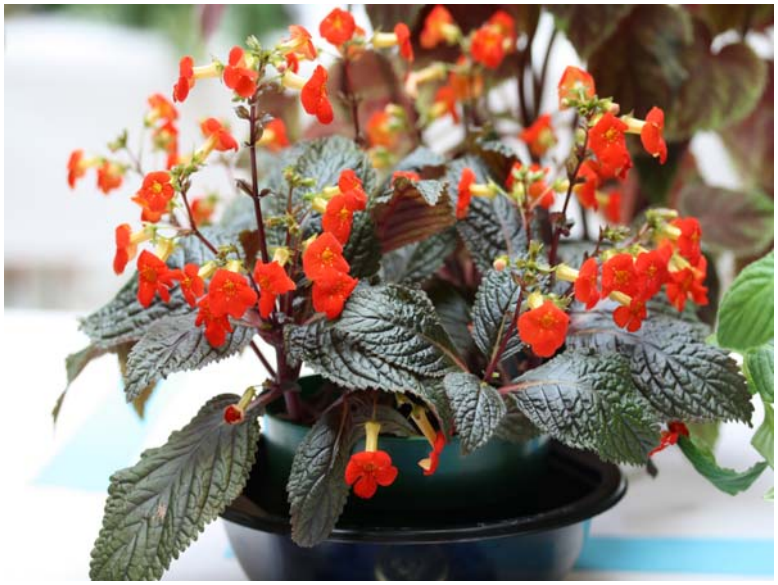
The dipping has an advantage over just spraying as you are treating the soil as well and that's important as the thrips lay their eggs in the soil and the dipping will kill the eggs.

It is a messy job to dip the plants and time consuming as well, especially if you have many plants. But it is well worth it in the end if you can be rid of the thrips.

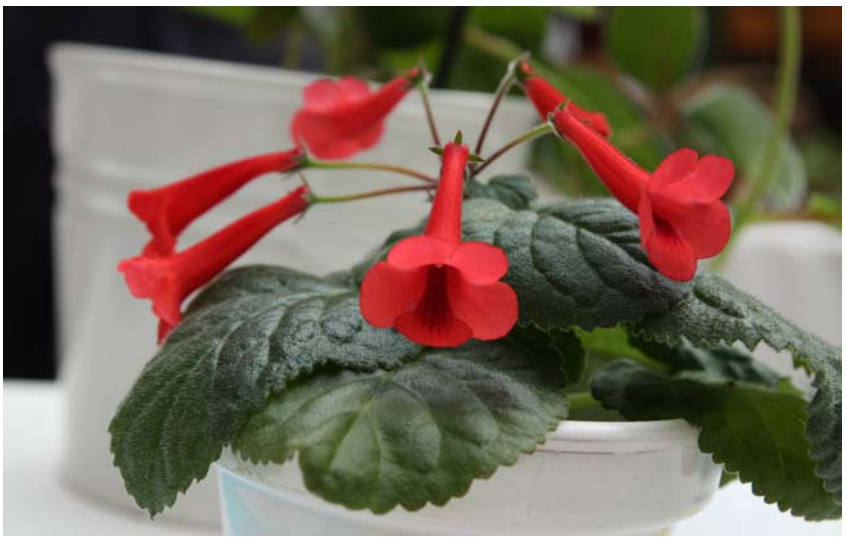
Ed.'s note: This is a product from Safer's soaps. However, it is not Omri listed and so not approved for organic growers. LM

# *Vancouver from Gesneriastnytt 17(2010) No.3, Ingrid Lindskog Ed.*

We liked the Asiatic ambiance of Richmond BC, and spent extra days with old Chinese friends. About the convention, the show was unbelievable, but did see it and judge it, so it must have been true. Very good was also to get the complete program, with rooms and a map of the story where all activities were, to download before leaving home. Spent the first day exploring and memorizing. So happy to have been there, not sure we could manage such a long trip again. The very best part was the visit to Bill's home, much more lush surroundings than imagined on such a steep slope, and the manifold ecological niches for gesneriad growth. Sea view between the huge trees. Everyone wanted to know about his soil mix and he made no secret about it: "The mix I use for most of my gesneriads consists of a 1/3 each by volume of New Zealand spagnum moss (reconstituted pellets), perlite and vermiculite (I try to use the coarsest perlite and vermiculite I can find). To this I also add some dolomite lime and charcoal. For my streps, Chiritas and Saintpaulias, I use regular peat moss instead of New Zealand sphagnum. Recently I have been trying out the mix that the greenhouse owner (where we grew our sales plants) uses. He uses coir which I have not yet used in a mix. I am trying it with a few things (Streps, Saintpaulias and some Chiritas) but it's too soon to tell how it's working. Good growing, Bill"



"Diastema comiferum, Best in Show (Umea 2010), grown by Ingrid Lindskog. This plant was past its peak, tons of dry flowers had been removed. Photo by Maike Lundberg.



Sinningia 'Red Raindrops' shared 1rst prize in section A. Seen from above the flowers fromed a perfect star. Grower Inger Nilsson, Photo by Lena Klintberg

##########

## *Editorial*

The river beside our house is once again frozen over, mostly shiny, dark and deep. However, there are spots spiraling round and white as if some whirling dervish had bumped down a landing here and there. I keep expecting a hungry beaver or curious otter to come out from the river grass. All is quiet and frigid. It is time to immerse in the light of the floracart and cosset the gesneriads. Poor streps are watered too much and untamed gesneriads are pruned to show standards. Hopefully, they will recover by July. Time to plan the trip to Philadelphia. Time, also, to collect precious seeds, clean and send them to Karyn Cichocki , 79 Beaver Run Rd., Lafayette, NJ 07848(USA) or Marilyn Allen , 8 Brackenridge Place, Port Moody, BC ,Canada V3H 4G4.

Wishing all festive holidays and a floriferous New Year!

Leslie Milde, P.O. Box 14, Fremont, NH 03044

Wishing all Joyous Holidays and a floriferous New Year,

# *A Better Way to Water by Pat Hancock*

***From September 2010 issue of the Violet Connection, a publication of the Ohio African Violet Soc., Mel Grice, Ed. and Gesneriad Tips 'n Trivia 34(2010)Sept., Ed. Karyn Cichocki***

This may not be new to everyone, and I can't take credit for the idea, but I am so impressed with my plants being grown with this method that I had to pass it on. David Rollins told me about it last year at the Dixie Convention. When I later asked him if he "invented" it, he said the idea came from someone else but he though of the black felt.

To use this watering method you will need light weight black felt that can be purchased at Wal-Mart or Jo-Ann Fabrics, egg crate lighting louver plastic sheets that can be purchased at Home Depot or Lowes and large Perma-Nest green plant trays (11" x 22" x 2.5") that can be purchased from Cape Cod Violetry. You need to cut the egg crate to fit the bottom of the tray or a little larger so that it sits on the little lip at the top of each tray. If you place the egg crate sheets in the bottom, you might want to put Styrofoam blocks or something similar to raise them up just a bit. I have tried both ways and I prefer resting them on the lip, especially for miniatures and semiminiatures.

Cut the felt the width of the egg crate allowing extra length so that the felt is long enough to wrap around it and lay underneath. Thus when fertilizer water is added to the tray, the excess felt flaps in the tray wicks it up onto the top. The wicked plants are then placed on top of the damp felt that both waters them and provides them with the humidity that they love.

I feel it is probably necessary to wick the plants grown in this way. I use 4 ply acrylic yarn cut about 4 or 5 inches long with half of it placed in the bottom of the pot and half outside the pot. When I pot plants in 3 1/2" or larger pots, I add about 1 1/2 " extra coarse perlite (available in hydroponic stores) on top of the wick and then fill in with potting soil. The perlite provides extra drainage and air spaces and violet roots seem to really love it. Perhaps it reminds them of their original growing places in the rock crevices of Africa.

So far, I have not let my trays go completely dry but David tells me there is nothing to worry about if this should happen. They will pick up the moisture again as soon as they are watered. I have never seen plants grow as fast as they do with this method and they look such a "healthy green" color. Many of my baby plants in 2" pot have buds in only a little more than 1 1/2 months. Large plants are grown only one per tray. Standard sized plants (12" -15") are grown two or three in each tray. Plants in 3 1/2" or 4" pots can be six or eight in each tray depending on the spread of their foliage.

Try this method on just one tray and you will become a "believer". I think it is the easiest watering method that I have ever used and it sure beats washing water wells. It doesn't beat chocolate, but close!

Mel Grice says, :"I have tried it and it really works!!!! I also have streps, sinningias, chiritas, kohlerias on it besides AVs. I was never able to grow lysionotus and gesneria well until I tried this system. Columneas seem to work much better for me on this...The felt has to be the cheapest grade of felt you can buy. Hold it up to the light and you should see lots of air holes. This seems to provide the right amount of water and air. Use lots of perlite in your soil mixture."
(Photos by M. Grice)