Stop 364 Adult Tour – Gesneriads and African Violets, Warm Temperate House

Some of the most beautiful and easy plants to grow houseplants belong to the gesneriad family. Numbering over 2,500 species, gesneriads include the popular Gloxinia and Streptocarpus. This diverse and striking family displays a wide array of flower shapes and colors.

Perhaps best-known among the gesneriads is the African Violet. On a collecting trip in 1892, Baron Walter von Saint Paul found the purple flowered plant in the humid mountain forests of East Africa in what is now Tanzania. The plant was classified in the gesneriad family and given the botanical name of ‘saintpaulia’ in his honor - specifically Saintpaulia ionantha. Since then over 20 additional species have been found in the wild. Over the past century, African violets have been hybridized quite extensively resulting in hundreds of new cultivars, which have expanded the range of flower color and form. Our collection here includes many species found in the wild, as well as named cultivars.

African violets are easy to grow as long as you provide them with conditions that are similar to their native tropical habitat - so a temperature range of between 65 and 75 degrees is the most favorable. They do best in soil, which is loose, porous, and well-draining because in their homeland, they often grow in rocky crevices near rivers. When watering though, take care never to get cold water on the leaves or it will cause them to discolor. Their preference for moist, humid conditions makes a bathroom or kitchen window a great place to keep an African violet. But keep in mind, that in living on the forest floor, these plants are adapted to lower light levels. So in your home, strong, filtered light or bright shade will protect the plant from leaf scorch, especially during the summer months, and contribute to prolific blooms throughout the year.