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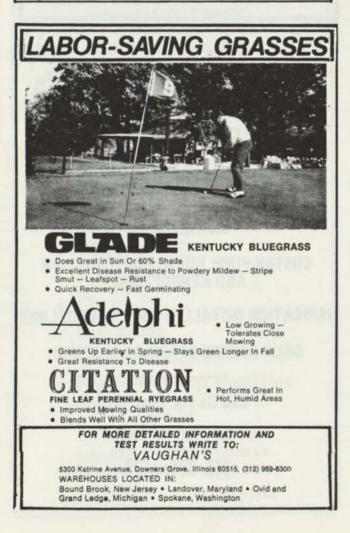
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## **TRY AFRICAN VIOLETS**

African Violets are the most popular house plants in the country. They flower the year around, and their cultural requirements are easier to provide than those of nearly any other house plants.

Both single and double flowering varieties are available throughout the year. Varieties range in flower color from white to pink, blue, lavender and deep violet.

Flowering is primarily influenced by the amount of light the plant receives. It may be necessary to try various locations in order to find the best site for continuous flowering in your home. If light is too intense, the foliage may be bleached and burned. Insufficient light causes poor flowering and elongated petioles. From November through February, locate plants to receive direct sunlight. Move the plants to indirect, bright light from March through October.

African Violets can be grown entirely under artificial light from two forty watt florescent tubes in an industrial fixture. Gloxinias, Episcias, Tuberous Rooted Begonias, and Ever-blooming Begonias can also be grown with this installation. One standard cool white and one day-light tube placed 8 to 10 inches above the foliage will provide minimum light necessary for flowering. At least 12 hours of light are required each day, but 18 hours of light will produce more plant growth and flowering. A four-tube fixture (two tubes of each type) approximately doubles the light intensity and produces even more desirable plants.

Use water at room temperature for surface application to violets; cold water causes spotting of the foliage. Bottom watering is convenient. Or, wickwatering containers are especially good for African Violets. A fiberglass wick inserted into the drainhole in the pot draws water by capillary action from a separate pan or reservoir beneath the pot, into the soil. With this system the soil is kept moist, neither excessively wet or dry.

Both the bottom watering and wick systems may result in accumulation of salt or hardness on the surface of the soil, since the water moves up rather than down. Periodic leaching (heavy surface watering) to wash out accumulated salts will usually prevent problems.

Night temperatures of 65°F. to 70°F. are satisfactory for violets; day temperatures can be five degrees higher. Foliage will curl downward and flowering will be retarded if plants are exposed to temperatures lower than 65°F.

James A. Fizzell, Senior Extension Adviser Horticulture, University of Illinois