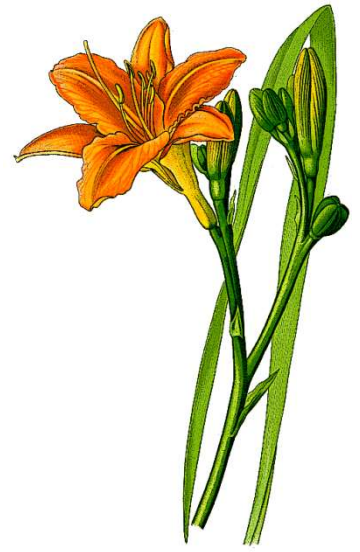


January 2021



South Schuylkill Garden Club

Third Tuesday of the Month at 6:30

Jerusalem Lutheran Church, Schuylkill Haven

www.southschuylkillgardenclub.com

www.facebook.com/soschuylkillgardenclub.com

Cultivating the Community Newsletter

*Weather Folklore: The sharper the blast, the sooner
it's past*

Planning for 2021

If all goes well in 2021, we will resume a modified schedule for club meetings and activities. As always the situation in which we all find ourselves in will dictate gatherings. It is our hope that club activities will resume in May of 2021. We hope that we will be able to have plant sale on May 22 with a club meeting May 18. Both activities will be held outdoors. The club meeting will be under the pavilion on the "Island" in Schuylkill Haven and the plant sale itself will be held at the Senior Recreation Center in Haven like in the past.

What will the summer and fall months bring? Looks like other outdoor meetings. Some of those meetings under the pavilion in Haven and hopefully at members' homes where they will graciously share their gardens with club members and ideas can be shared.

Fall will hopefully bring back the Schuylkill Haven Days where we can again sell some of the fruits of our labors with those delicious jams and jellies.

All of this planning is tentative. We will just have to roll with the time. In the meantime Stay Safe. God Bless.

Host a Meeting

Realizing that the start of 2021 will not allow ease of indoor gatherings, the structure for Garden Club meetings will be to have a meeting at Schuylkill Haven Island Park Pavilion one month and a gathering at a garden club member's home the next month. This gets us an opportunity to know our fellow gardeners better.

Consider hosting a meeting in your yard during the warm weather months from **June to October**. Hosting does not include refreshments, but an opportunity to tour your garden and discussion challenges. Attendees are responsible for their own chairs. Masking as the culture dictates.

Please email or call Kim Morgan at 570-617-9620 or Jane Kruse at 570-628-4802 by **January 25** in order for planning of the non-host months. – Jane

Plant Sale

South Schuylkill Garden Club is planning to host an outdoor plant sale at the Schuylkill Haven Recreation/Senior Center on Saturday, **May 22**. Consider what you would like to contribute. More on this as the plans materialize. - Jane

April Tea

With the uncertainties of restriction with may extend into the early spring months, the April Membership Tea will not be planned. How the rest of the year opens up to more friendly gatherings will determine efforts to invite new prospective members into the club. – Jane

Rachel Carson Learning Center

GCFP and the Landscape Design Society of Western Pennsylvania joined forces in 1987 to create an educational center at Rachel Carson Homestead in Springdale, PA along the Allegheny River. Rachel Carson, scientist, author of Silent Spring, warned of the continual use of pesticides and danger to the environment. She studied, wrote and taught in marine biology along the eastern coast. Books also include The Sea Around Us and Under the Sea Wind. –Jane

Pennsylvania Farm Show

Available virtually at “Virtual 2021 Fam Show/Penn State” or <https://extension.psu.edu/home-page-topics/farm-show>. Dates are Jan 9-16, 2021.

A sampling of morning seminar topics offered through Penn State Extension are:

Jan 9 9:00 Common Myths of Ticks a d Mosquitoes

Jan 12 8:00 Backyard Woods for wildlife

Jan 14 8:00 Backyard Wildlife Oasis - Jane

Tree Planting from 2020

In 2020 flower club members were encouraged to plant trees. Now it is time to collect the numbers. Please contact Jane with the numbers of trees that you might have planted in 2020. **Jane can be reached at 570-628-4802**

The Argument for Houseplants

Houseplants can provide culinary, intellectual, and psychological benefits. Read on to discover the advantages of nurturing indoor plants.



Photo credit: Kim Frey, Lancaster County Master Gardener

Whether you fill your home with a collection of plants or select just one or two specimens, houseplants provide a myriad of benefits. They can enhance your décor. They can also fulfill culinary, intellectual, and psychological needs. Houseplants can save you money. With more and more people working remotely, it is important to note that plants in the workplace can even increase employee productivity.

The beauty of the flower, foliage, color, and structure of plants is undeniable. It is fun to match the plant and its container to your interior décor, whether that is traditional, country, contemporary, modern, formal, or casual. You can find foliage or bloom in colors to compliment almost any color in your home. The plant itself can enhance an area, but combined with the careful choice of container,

it can truly make the space. You can create vignettes of varied foliage as you would outside, contrasting ferny, spiky, and round-leaved plants. You can even create mixed containers using a composition of "thrillers, fillers, and spillers." You can use the design principle of repetition to create visual impact.

Plants can evoke emotional responses. They can be bold, such as the bright orange bloom emerging from a bromeliad. They can be cute, such as the pink polka-dot plant (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*) and miniature [African violet](#) (*Saintpaulia ionantha*). They can be strong, such as a three-foot cactus. They can be intriguing, such as the starfish snake plant (*Sansevieria cylindrica* var. *patula* 'Boncel'), [air plants](#) (*Tillandsia* spp.), and living stones (*Lithops* spp.).

Houseplants provide something living and green in the depths of winter when the ground is blanketed in snow. This can be good for your wellbeing. When you decorate for the holidays, include a new plant or two, such as amaryllis and poinsettia. Forcing bulbs, such as hyacinth or paperwhites, to bloom in February provides an indoor springtime environment, while outside you may have to wait until April. [Bringing tropical plants indoors](#) to be treated as houseplants during the winter months can save you money and help you increase your collection from year to year.

Every December for the past decade, the eight-foot tall weeping fig tree (*Ficus benjamina*) in my living room has been decorated with white lights and ornaments. It becomes our substitute for the traditional conifer Christmas tree. This was made necessary the first year by an allergic reaction to pollen from a cut fir tree but continues yearly to satisfy my need for tradition and to be frugal.

Some plants can also satisfy your sense of smell and touch. The aroma from brushing against a scented geranium (*Pelargonium* spp.) can provide a moment of calm or even joy. Varieties of scented geraniums include nutmeg, oak, pine, coconut, peppermint, orange, rose, lemon-rose, and lemon. Some have furry leaves that are a pleasure to touch. Place one where you can delightfully brush

against it. The blooms from a Meyer lemon (*Citrus × meyeri*) or Key lime tree (*Citrus aurantifolia*) can scent an entire room, but be aware that their pollen may irritate those with allergies.

Some indoor plants can be useful in the kitchen. Snipped herbs for soup, a just-harvested lemon for fish, or lettuce leaves for your salad are all possible given a sunny window or fluorescent light. The convenience is enhanced by saving money and a trip to the grocery store. (Please note that some houseplants are poisonous. Avoid those that may harm your pets.)

Houseplants can also be a source of lifelong learning. Challenge yourself with something new this winter. Design and create a [closed terrarium](#). Grow and learn to prune a tropical bonsai tree. Learn the proper method to propagate your houseplants and give the new starts to friends. Educate yourself about forcing bulbs. Start a collection of interesting varieties of succulents or orchids. Note that a collection of plants can be made more visually cohesive and less "busy" by being planted in containers of the same color.

Research on the psychological benefits of plants shows that in the workspace plants make employees more physically, cognitively, and emotionally involved with their work. Employee productivity was measured and increased by as much as 15%.

If this article were written a few years ago, there would be a section on how houseplants clean toxins from the air. New research has shown that using this method would be highly inefficient. For a 1500 square foot house, you would need 680 plants to achieve the same airflow as a couple of open windows.

Houseplants cannot provide their benefits if they get sick or die. You want to be successful, so follow some simple rules.

First, know the conditions where you want to place the plant and then select a plant that will do well in those conditions, just as you would for an outdoor site. The gardener's adage of "Right Plant, Right

Place" applies equally to houseplants. The plant tag should explain its requirements. The two most important conditions are the levels of light and humidity. Indoor light is considered direct where a plant can receive the sun's rays, in front of a bright south-facing window. Succulents thrive in direct light. Indirect light levels are defined as high, medium, and low, measured in foot candles (ftc). You can provide supplemental light with a proper lamp. Plants also need varying amounts of humidity. A high humidity area, such as a bathroom, would be perfect for a fern but not a cactus. Low humidity can be raised by adding a humidifier, misting plants, grouping them together, or placing a tray nearby filled with pebbles and water.

Second, as in your outdoor garden, decide on how much time you want to spend on maintenance. Some houseplants may be very time-consuming with misting, pruning, and repotting. If you want a relatively maintenance-free choice, make a closed terrarium, or choose a tried-and-true plant. Snake plants (*Sansevieria* spp.), pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*), and philodendrons (*Philodendron* spp.) thrive in indirect high, medium, and low light conditions and need to be watered only when the top inch or so of the soil is dry.

Finally, and most important, start with a healthy plant. Look it over carefully in the nursery, and reject it if it shows signs of disease or pests.

Susan Marquesen

Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver

Allegheny County

I included this next article for Jeannie Z. I have the fortune to see her African violet collection and was WOW by how beautiful her violets were. Jeannie has a talent for her violets.

African Violet Care

Learn about the pleasure of having African violets as houseplants and how to avoid problems and pests.



Photo credit: Robin Stryker

Many of us may have fond memories of visiting our grandmother's house and seeing her beautiful African violets (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) blooming. As we grew older with our own house and family, she may have offered to give us a propagated cutting. Her plants thrived because they were living in an ideal situation, developed through many years of experience. Maintaining African violets as healthy and beautiful as our grandmother's plants is possible through understanding this plant's growing requirements and potential challenges.

One particularly important requirement is proper lighting. Bright light is needed, but it cannot be direct sunlight. African violets like a north, northwest, or northeast-facing window. Place the plant a good three feet away from a south-facing window. Supplementing with fluorescent lights may be necessary if you cannot find the ideal lighting situation.

As far as temperature, African violets thrive in the same range that we enjoy, between 60° and 80°F.

Proper humidity can make a difference in the health of your plants. If your home has dry heat, a small humidifier near the plants may be helpful. Setting a tray of pebbles and water nearby can raise the humidity. You can also set the plant directly on a tray of pebbles with water, but ensure that the base of the plant is above the water level in the tray. Water your African violet when just the top of the soil is dry but before it becomes hard

and crusty or the plant wilts. Avoid getting the leaves wet during watering. If water remains in the bottom saucer an hour after watering, you should drain this off. Otherwise or the roots may begin to rot.

African violets require fertilizing on a regular basis. Use a fertilizer that is specially formulated for African violets, as it will provide the proper balance of nutrients. Follow the directions on the container carefully.

If you have met all of these conditions and your plants are not thriving, pests may be the issue. Due to the structure of the plant, pests often hide at the base of the leaves or in the foliage. The best defense for pests, of course, is to make sure that you begin with healthy plants. Detecting pests can be difficult, but it can get easier when you know what to look for.

Several kinds of mealybugs infest African violets, including the citrus mealybug (*Planococcus citri*) and the Comstock mealybug (*Pseudococcus comstocki*). These insects have soft bodies that are covered with a white, waxy material, making them look like small pieces of perlite. Root mealybugs may not be noticed unless you look directly at the root ball. They damage plants by sucking out their sap. Sometimes there are obvious signs of an infestation, such as stunted or distorted leaves. But often the plant just doesn't look healthy. Light infestations of mealybugs can be controlled by removing them with a cotton swab dipped in rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol. Heavy infestations may require the disposal of the plant to prevent spread.

Thrips, usually *banded greenhouse thrips* (*Hercinothrips femoralis*), are a common pest for African violets and can cause a great deal of damage. These very small insects (1/16 of an inch) are long and narrow and are yellowish to blackish in color. Thrips have narrow wings with long hairs along the back edge which make them capable of flying. When they are disturbed, their rapid movement allows for detection. Before purchasing an African violet, tap or blow gently on the leaves. This will cause the pests to move, and you will be

able to see them. Another sign of thrips is silvery spots on the flowers and/or foliage.

Cyclamen mites (*Phytonemus pallidus*) appear as unexplained patches of a whitish dust on the leaves. You may suspect this problem when the center of the plant where the new leaves develop isn't growing right. The new leaves and flowers may remain small and appear distorted. Discard heavily infested plants.

Treatments for these pest problems include insecticidal soap. Always read and follow the instructions on the pesticide label fully and carefully.

African violets are a joy. Once you understand their growing requirements and some of their challenges, you too may be giving offshoots from your collection to friends and family.

Karen M. Bern, Master Gardner

Sue Drabic, Master Gardner

Susan Marquesen, Master Gardner

May you All Have a

Blessed New Year.

Stay Safe by staying socially separated from others by at least 6 feet. Wash hands frequently and above all don't touch your face, but with clean hands.