

# OPTIMARA

## AFRICAN VIOLET GUIDE

Introductory Guide to the Wild World of African Violets



### EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GROW BEAUTIFUL AFRICAN VIOLETS

- African Violet Terms
- Basic Care Tips
- Flower Parts
- Violet History
- Online Resources
- Leaf Shapes, Types, Colors & Edges
- Flower Shapes, Colors, Edges & Patterns



**The World's  
Most Popular  
Flowering  
Houseplant!**



Guide To African Violets Is Brought To You By  myViolet.com





# OPTIMARA

African Violet Guide

## **AFRICAN VIOLET** (*Saintpaulia ionantha*)

African Violets are the world's most popular houseplant.

They are easy to care for,  
they bloom all year long,  
they thrive in moderate light,  
the diversity in colors, shapes, foliage  
and bloom types is breathtaking.

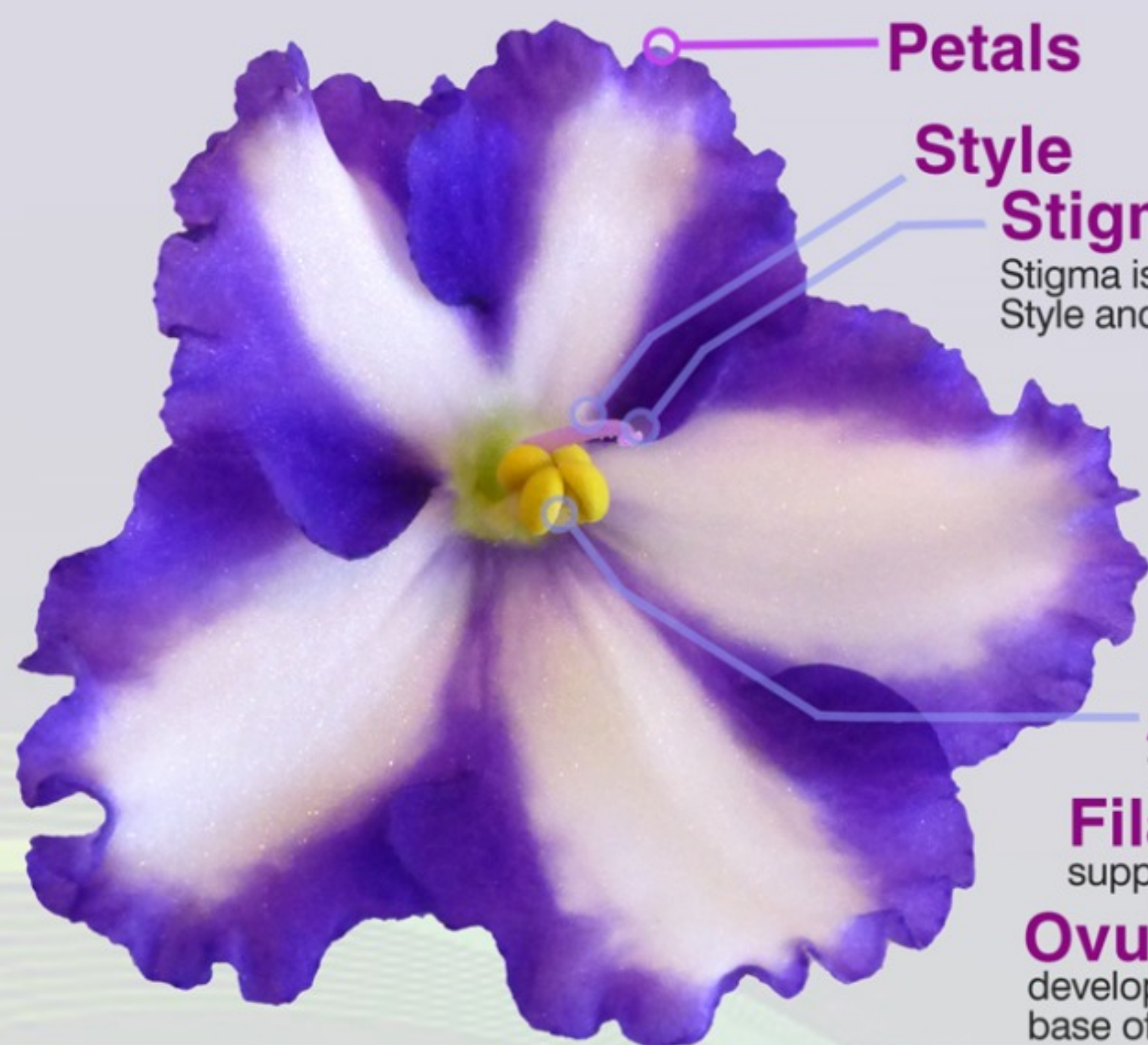
**African Violets  
are truly the  
houseplant of the future!**







## PARTS OF AN AFRICAN VIOLET ( *Saintpaulia ionantha* )



**Petals**

**Style**

**Stigma**

Stigma is the tip of the Style and receives pollen

**Anther**

yellow pollen containers

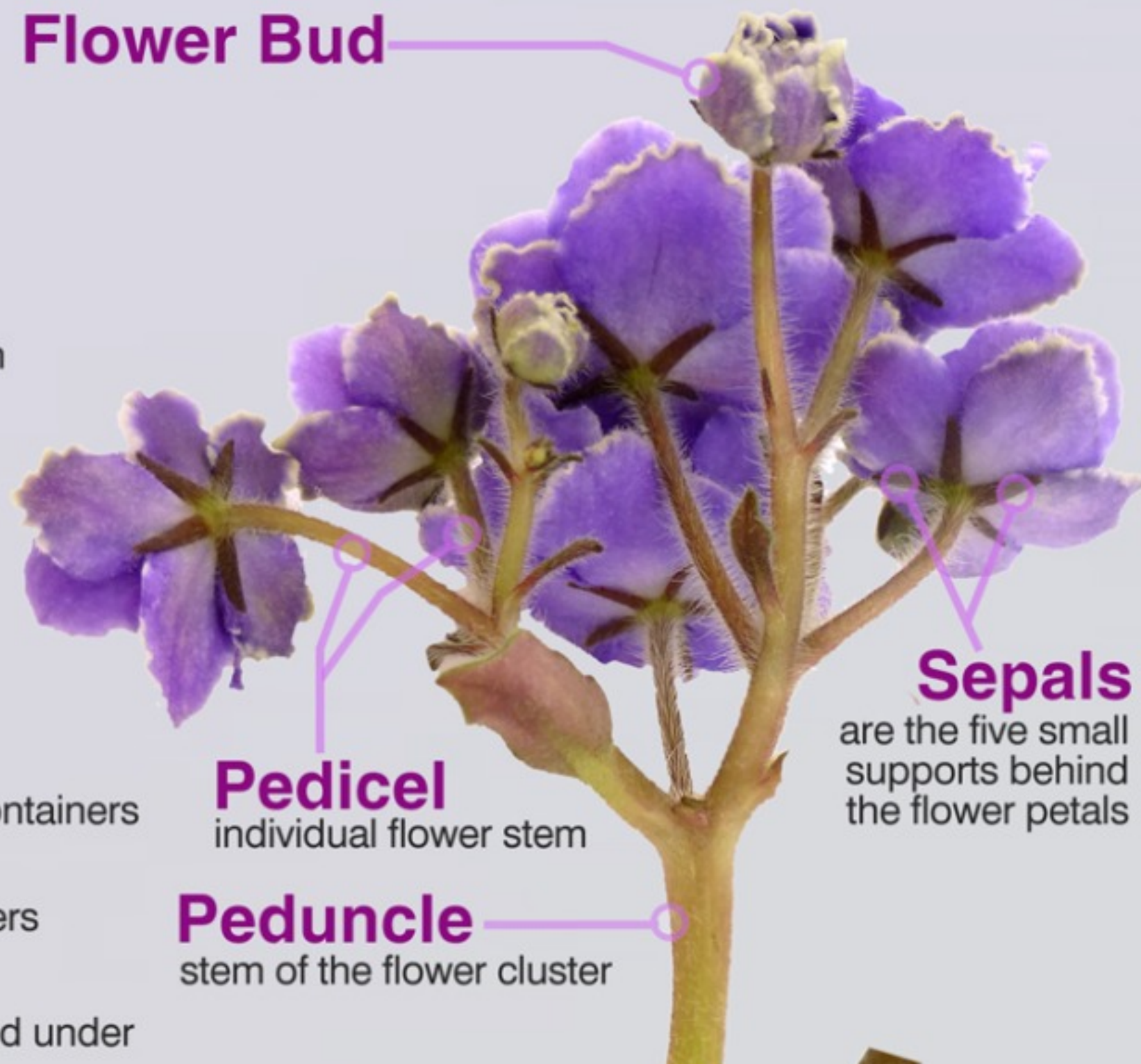
**Filament**

support for the Anthers

**Ovum**

develops seeds, located under base of the filaments.

**Flower Bud**



**Sepals**

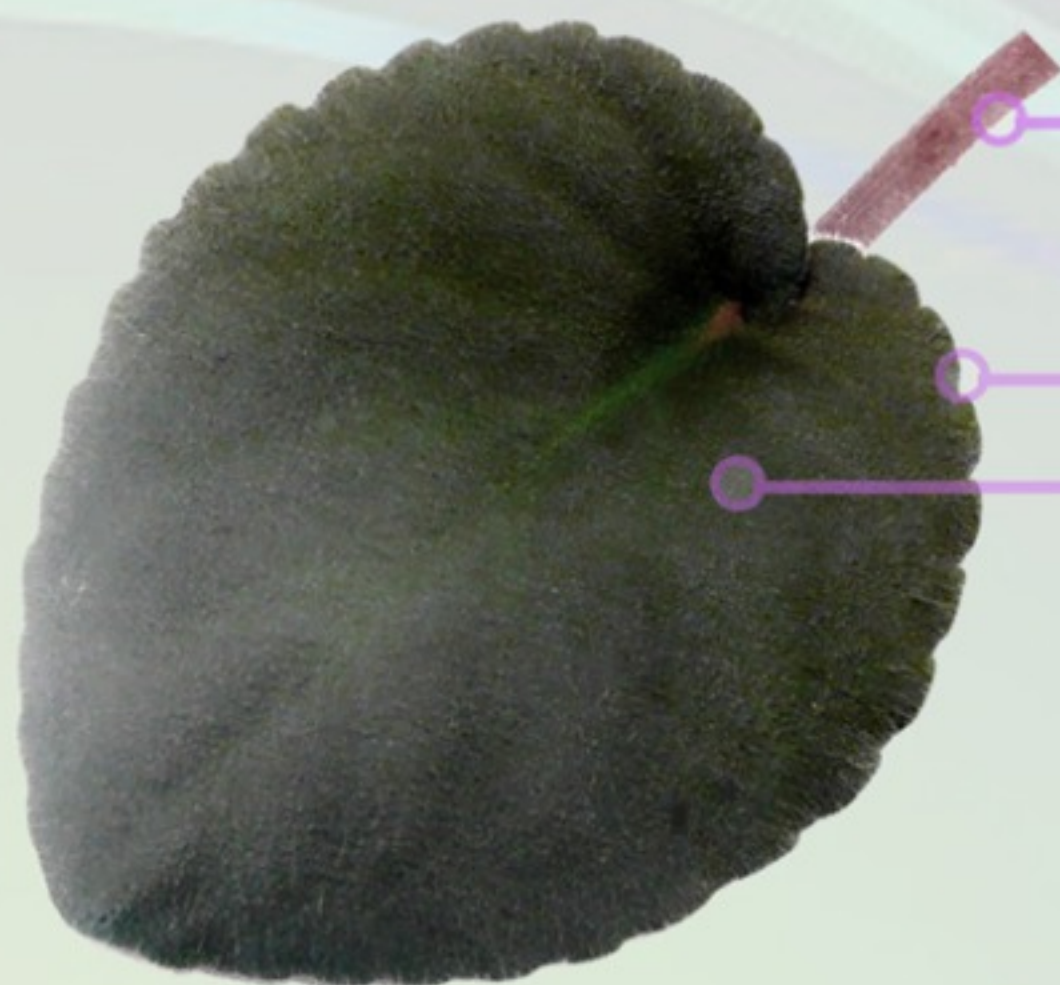
are the five small supports behind the flower petals

**Pedicel**

individual flower stem

**Peduncle**

stem of the flower cluster



**Petiole**

technical word for leaf stem

**Edge**

**Surface**

**Lateral Veins**

carry nutrients to the leaf

**Tip**



**Bouquet/Head**

the flowers above the foliage

**Crown**

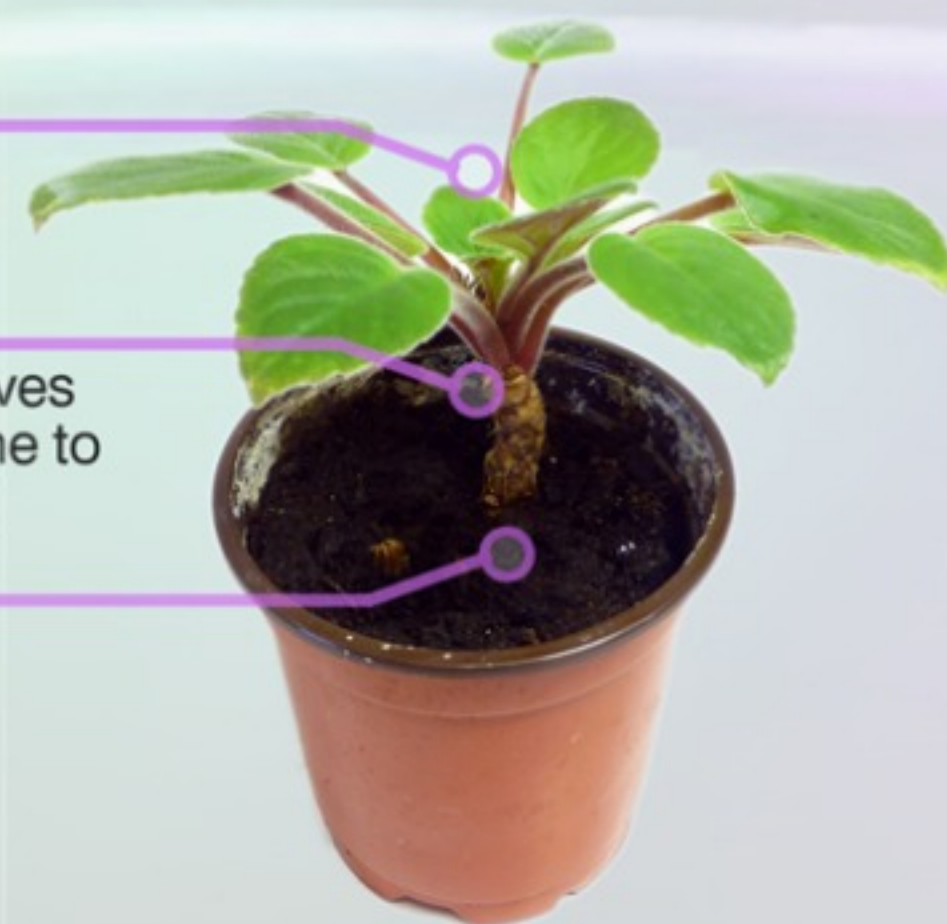
the central point of growth

**Neck**

as the plant grows and sheds leaves it forms a neck, this means it's time to re-pot so the crown is at soil level

**Roots**

African Violet roots grow fast and plants flower the best in the right size container.







**FLOWER SHAPES:** African Violets come in a variety of basic flower types. Often flowers will have multiple combinations of these shapes and edge characteristics.



## Pansy, single

Five petals, two on the top are smaller



## Semi-double

Over five petals, less than 10, often crested or curled in center



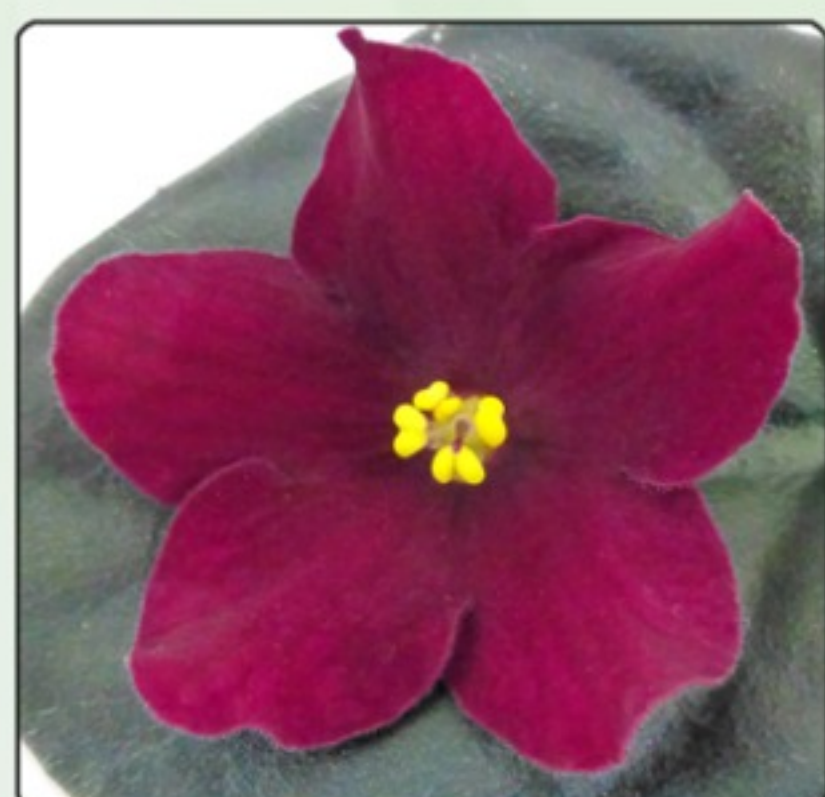
## Double

Ten petals or more, completely covering the center anthers



## Double+

Over twenty petals, twice that of a double, 43 on this flower



## Star, single

Five to six petals, all of the same size



## Double Star

Ten petals or more on a star shaped bloom



## Bell

Five to six petals which are connected to form a narrow bell, pansy



## Cup

Five to seven petals, connected to form a shallow cupped star



## Wasp

Small twisted petals, 'bunny ears', tubular narrow or curved lobes



## Fluted Petal

Petals have a bowed shape at the tip



## Frilled

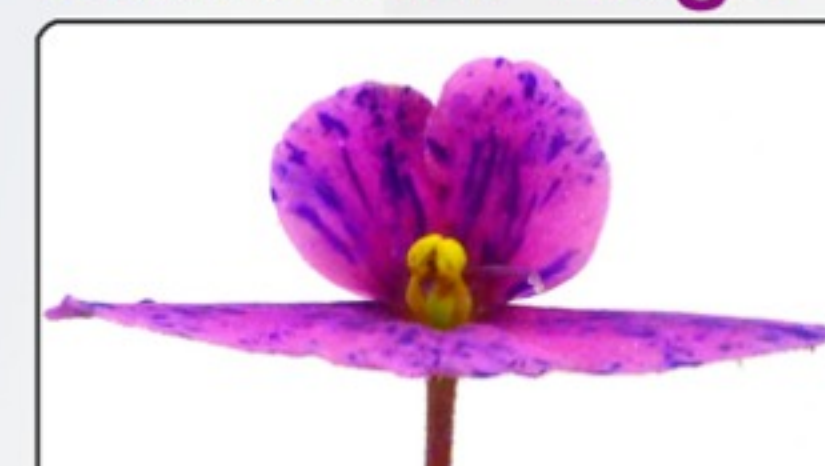


## Frilled / Ruffled

A lightly to densely convoluted or ruffled



## Multicolor Edge



## Flat Petals

Lower petals forming an almost flat plane

Top Row: Optimara Indiana, Rhapsodie Cora, Paris, Moonstone sport  
2nd Row: Optimara Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Annabelle, RS-Chudo Landysh (Svetlana Repkina) photo courtesy of Jennifer at africanviolet.co.uk  
3rd Row: Optimara Hiroshige, Clementine, Louisiana, EverSpecial, EverPrecious, Little Hopi





**FLOWER COLORS, PATTERNS & EDGES:** Violets are hybridized to display many colorful patterns. There is no fixed limit to these color combinations, these are the most popular.



1. Clementine, Stephanie, Inca, Evelyn, South Dakota, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Sacarlet, Aztec 2. Connecticut, Apatite, Tourmaline, Teresa, Michigan, Nancy, Crystal, Optimara Y1 & G1



### Two-Tone

Two shades of the same color



### Bi-Color

Two unique colors, if more, then **Multi-Color**



### Dark Eye

Color fading to darker tone in center



### White Eye

Petals fading to white tone in center



### Thumbprint

Color on just the middle and tips of petals



### Chimera

A striped bloom mutation that can be propagated by suckers, not by leaf



### Colored Edge

A sharp color change on the petal edge, can range from thin to wide



### Speckled Edge

A fine dotted color fade on the petal edge



### Geneva Edge

A white or silver trim on the petal edge, with slight texture change



### Raised Edge

A thick, often ruffled edge can be white, silver, green, pale amber & even gray

## Fantasy Patterns



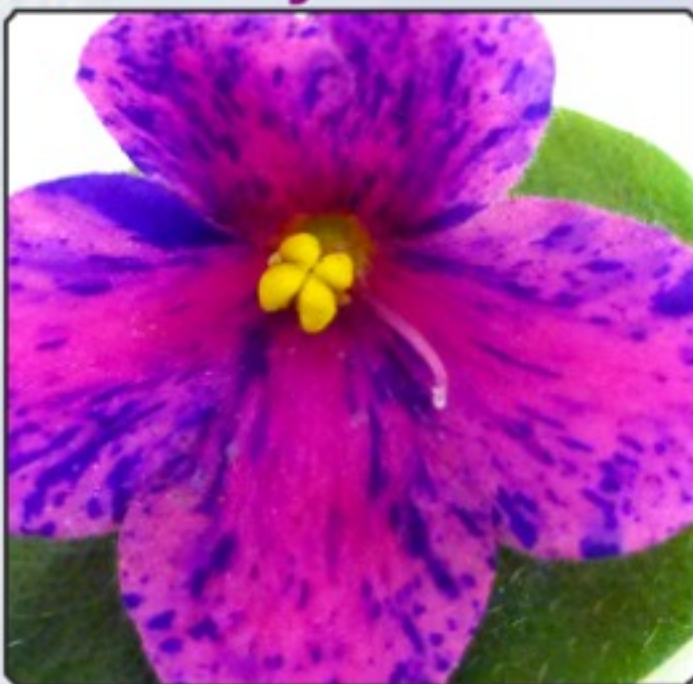
### Rays

Mostly linear or banded color display on petals



### Puffs

Soft edged dots and oblong blobs of color



### Streaks & Dots

Randomly distributed flecks of color



### Feathering

Branching color-veins following petal contour



### Watermark

Darker colored border separating two colors

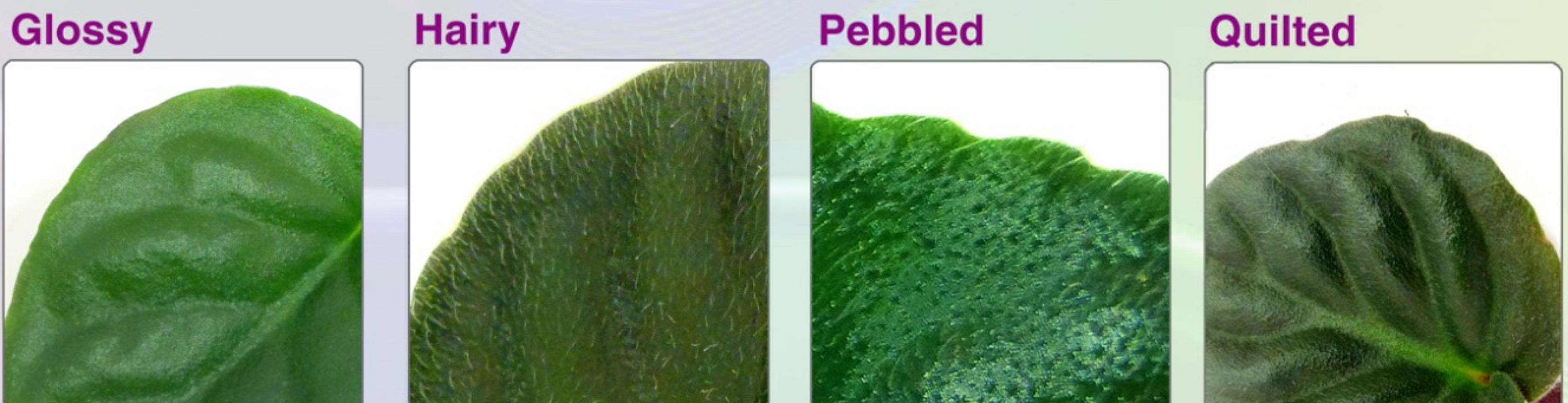
Top: Optimara Angelica, Gisela, myJoy, Dali, Chagall 2nd Row: Optimara EverLove Chimera, Harlequin, Michèle, Yellowstone, EverSpecial. 3rd Row: Rays - Optimara Unamed blue/lilac, Puff - Storm's Eye, hybridized by Lyndon Lyon Greenhouses/P. Sorano, grown/photographed by Belinda Breau Thibodeaux, Streaks and Dots - Optimara Little Hopi II, Feathering - Cajun's Royal Jewels, hybridized, grown and photographed by Belinda Breau Thibodeaux, Watermark - Optimara unnamed variety



**LEAF SHAPES & TYPES:** African Violets are also classified by leaf shape or type. Often leaves will have varying mixtures of these basic shapes, textures and edge types.



## Surface Textures



**Top Row:** Optimara Indiana, Rhapsodie Cora, Rhapsodie Patricia, Optimara Yellowstone, Rhapsodie Loretta  
**2nd Row:** Clackamus, -Maas' Angela (hybridized by M. Maas) and Bustle-backed leaf - Senk's Beanstalk (hybridized by R. Follett/D. Senk) grown and photographed by Alcie Maxwell  
**3rd Row:** Longifolia, Senk's Snowy Egret, (hybridized by R. Follett/D. Senk) grown and photographed by Jeannie M. Myers





**LEAF COLORS & PLANT SIZES:** African Violets range from light to very dark green with deep red reverse on the leaves, they are also cultivated in a few distinct size categories.

## Light Green



## Medium Green



## Dark Green



## Light Green / Silver

## Pink / Watermelon

## Deep Red

## Variegated



## Crown Style



## Mosaic Style



## Tommie Lou



## Chimera Leaf



**Variegated Leaf** Multiple colors in streaked, edged, blotched or speckled patterns on foliage. Colors may be shades of light to dark green, cream, tan, pink and yellow.

## African Violet Sizes



**6" Large**  
over 16 inches wide



**4" Standard**  
8 to 16 inches wide



**3" Semi-mini**  
6 to 8 inches



**2" Miniature**  
less than 6 inches



**Trailing African Violet**  
petite, sprawling growth, multiple crowns and dense flowering

**Leaf:** Coral, Chico, Gauguin, Evelyn, Arkansas **Variegated:** Optimara Romance, Crown - Rob's Chilly Willy (hybridized by R. Robinson), Mosaic - Emperor (hybridized by R. Taylor) both grown/photographed by Jeannie M. Myers, Tommie Lou - Ma's Easter Parade (O. Robinson) grown/photographed by Alcie Maxwell  
**Sizes:** 6" Space Violet EverSpecial, 4" Rhapsodie Monique, 3" Optimara Orlando, 2" Little Azurite **Trailer:** Broadway Star Trail grown/photographed by Darlene Allen





**AFRICAN VIOLET CARE TIPS:** Keep your African Violets in perfect health and constant bloom with this simple set of guidelines. For more care tips visit [myViolet.com](http://myViolet.com) and use our free “Doctor Optimara” care tool to diagnose any problem.

## Light

African Violets thrive in Indirect or filtered sunlight. Never place in full sun, LED and fluorescent lights are ok, if bright enough. For best results, place your Violets in a window where they will receive light most of the day, i.e., a window with western or southern exposure. Rotate your plant one-quarter turn, about once a week or each time you water. If not, they will grow towards the light and grow larger on the side closest to the window

## Watering

Keep soil moist but not soggy. Place in a 1” deep tray, water from below, wait 30 minutes and drain any excess. Water left on the leaves can cause spotting. Let soil get 80% dry once in a while. Overwatering can cause root-rot and wilting. Always use room temperature water, cold water causes damage, so be careful during winter.

## Temperature & Humidity

African Violets grow best at room temperature. 75° to 85°(F), but can tolerate short lows of 55° without damage. African violets need at least 50% humidity to bloom. Avoid drafty areas and sudden temperature changes, which will inhibit blooming. To increase humidity, place pebbles in a shallow tray of water and place near or under the violet.

## Soil & Repotting

African violets bloom best when they are root-bound. Keep in a 4 to 6” pot. The best potting soil for African Violets actually contains little or no dirt at all, specialty blends are very light and porous. This enhances aeration while keeping the soil moist, but not soggy. Compact mixes can easily crush the roots of African Violets. The pH should be between 5.8 and 6.2. Too high or low & nutrients are not absorbed. Re-pot in fresh soil once per year for more blooms!



Living Room Table or Window



Office / Fluorescent Lamp / Artificial Light



Kitchen Window

## Keep It Blooming

Groom as needed by removing wilted or dead outer leaves. Remove wilted flower-stalks to encourage more flowering.

You will get more blooms if you remove sucker plants that split from the main crown. These can be planted or discarded. Only grow one plant per pot.

If the plant has not bloomed in over 2 months then conditions need to be changed to promote flowering. Try a different window, add some African Violet Fertilizer to your water. Make sure your humidity & watering are fairly consistent. Adjust conditions a little and it will resume blooming.

Remember, your African Violet wants to bloom, just find the right spot in your home and it will reward your efforts with nearly constant flowering during any time of year.



## Where To Find African Violets:

### African Violets Can Be Found At:

- Large Retail Stores
- Local Nurseries / Garden Centers
- Local AVSA or Violet Clubs
- Flower Shops

or by Ordering Online

## Winter Care Tips

If your violets are in a window make sure the leaves are not touching cold glass. Sustained temperatures below 55°(F) will damage or kill African Violets. Keep them a few inches back from the window to avoid cold drafts. Indoor air can be too dry due to heating systems. This will inhibit or stop blooming. Use a humidifier to keep the levels above 50% humidity. Check soil moisture more often, they may need more water during winter. Often light can be lower during winter months. If your violet stretches out or stops blooming then move to a brighter spot or use artificial lights.

**The #1 mistake for experts and novices:** If the soil becomes bone-dry and too much water is added, a violet can die quickly. In this case the roots have died back from being too dry and the water can't be absorbed very fast. The damaged roots get infected and the plant succumbs to mold or other pathogens.

Lesson To Remember: If a plant is very dry, only give enough water to moisten the soil, skip 2 days, water a little, skip another 2 days then resume normal weekly watering.





**AFRICAN VIOLET INFO & TIPS:** Keep your African Violets in perfect health and constant bloom with these simple guidelines. For more care tips visit [myViolet.com](http://myViolet.com).

## More Tips:

**Pests and Disease:** As with other plants, African Violets can fall victim to a number of pests and pathogens. In almost all cases, preventing them is easier than treating them.

- Disinfect pots & tools before using by soaking in a 10% bleach solution. Soil can be sterilized by microwaving.
- Remove any spent flowers or leaves. Many pests either feed on or take refuge beneath decaying plant matter and spent leaves and flowers can also attract fungi such as Botrytis and Pythium (Crown Rot).
- Whenever possible, avoid watering from the top. We strongly advise using a mini-well or self-watering system.
- Make sure your African Violets are planted in the correct type of pot and that the pot size is not too large.
- Always maintain good air circulation around your plants. Botrytis and Crown Rot flourish in poor air circulation.



When repotting, consider adding Diatomaceous Earth to your potting soil. Diatomaceous Earth is a fully inert, non-volatile substance that has proven effective in fending off certain soil-borne pests. The recommended ratio is 1/4 tablespoon of Diatomaceous Earth for every one liter of soil.

## Miscellaneous:



Mature leaf of an Extra Large violet, compared to a mature leaf from a Super-Miniature variety



Little Sapphire, Super-Miniature 1-Inch

**Note About Pets:** African Violets are safe and non-poisonous to cats and dogs.



Some wasp blooms really look like insects! This is Blue Cascade, hybridized by David Senk.



Little Amethyst, Super-Miniature 1-Inch

Top Row: Optimara EverSpecial

2nd Row: Optimara EverGlory & kitty, Leaf comparison courtesy of [africanviolet.co.uk](http://africanviolet.co.uk), the extra large variety is ЕК-Дыхание Грозы/ EK-Dyhanije Grozy 'Breath Of Thunder' and the micro is Teeny Bopper (Minibomb) (L. Lyon)

3rd Row: Blue Cascade wasp, grown/photographed by Rachel Martin, Little Amethyst grown/photographed by Francois Black





**AFRICAN VIOLET HISTORY:** It began just over 120 years ago as a lucky discovery in the mountains of Tanzania and has now become the world's most popular houseplant.

## DISCOVERY of African Violets

The *Saintpaulia ionantha* was discovered in 1892 by Walter von Saint-Paul-Illaire in the wooded Usambara mountains near the border of Kenya & Tanzania. In the fall of 1892 samples were sent to Master Gardener of Herrenhaus Greenhouses, Hermann Wendland, who described the plant for the first time in the journal *Gartenflora*, Berlin in 1893. Wendland named the plant "*Saintpaulia ionantha*", combining the finder's name with the Greek roots *ion* ("blue violet") and *anthos* ("flower"). Technically, the flower is not really a violet. Whereas the genus *Viola* derives from the *Violaceae* family, *Saintpaulia* belongs to the *Gesneriad* family. The African Violet was first exhibited at the Fifth Genter Floral Show, on April 16 1893, it immediately caught the attention of experts.



1 - Martin Dorrenbach, Reinhold Holtkamp, Sr., Hermann Holtkamp, Sr., Hermann Holtkamp, Jr., Rudolf Holtkamp  
2 - Baron Walter von Saint-Paul-Illaire, Hermann Wendland, Reinhold Holtkamp Jr, Gisela Holtkamp & Reinhold Holtkamp Sr.

## First Hybrids, First New Colors:

The first 10 commercial hybrids were introduced in 1927, all of which had blue flowers. These are the cultivars from which many of today's varieties have been developed.

Their names are: Admiral, Amethyst, Blue Boy, Commodore, Mermaid, Neptune, Norseman, Number 32, Sailor Boy, and Viking.

It was from Blue Boy that the first double was developed in 1939. Blue Boy is also the variety from which boy-type leaves are named. In 1942 the American company Brockner developed the first pink violet on the market, that same year the first girl-leaf variety was derived from "Blue Boy" (Armacost) at Ulery Greenhouses in Springfield OH. The first white violet was bred soon after by Peter Ruggeri, named simply "White Lady", it came from a pink and blue mix.

## Original African Violets: *ionantha* & *tongwensis*



In addition to *ionantha*, 23 wild species of African Violets are known

## Holtkamp / Optimara Innovations:

Martin Dorrenbach started his greenhouse in 1903 and his son-in-law Hermann Holtkamp, Sr. began breeding his first *Saintpaulias* on only one square meter of greenhouse space in the 1930s. Beginning in 1956, Holtkamp began offering their African Violets under the trademark "Rhapsodie".

Hermann Holtkamp, Sr. propagated the "Biedermeier" style: a single crown plant, with only one plant per pot. One immediate advantage of this style has been the shortened growing period. In addition, it has resulted in the familiar rosette, in which leaves grow in the pattern of a "Biedermeier" flower bouquet. Today, African Violets are grown exclusively in this form.

In 1965, Reinhold Holtkamp Sr. (1935-2012) grew a crop of 20,000 violets to find a single non-dropping mutation. Violets were popular as a hobby but not seen in stores due to the tendency for blooms to drop their flowers if jostled or subjected to temperature changes. The first genetically stable 'sticktite' African Violet, Rhapsodie "Elfriede," had dark blue flowers that remained securely attached throughout blooming. Now taken for granted by growers, this characteristic took years to develop and has had an enormous impact on the industry by making blooming violets a shippable product. The breeders at Holtkamp / Optimara have contributed significantly to the spectrum of African Violet varieties. In addition to the well-known dark blue, Holtkamp developed many new, distinctly clear and bright hues, "Birgit" (pink), "Ruby" (red), "Gigi" (white with blue), "Linda" (true white), "Wega" (pink), "Margit" (blue), and "Candy" (lilac).

## Antique Rhapsodie Violet



**Optimara violets are bred to be the strongest, most floriferous with long lasting blooms, disease resistant, and less vulnerable to temperature shock than previous generations of African Violets.** We have developed new continuous-bloom characteristics with the space violets, and we are always moving forward with research into exciting foliage, new colors and innovative styles.





**AFRICAN VIOLET Communities:** Violets brighten the mood of any environment, they are fun to grow and require little maintenance. They make great gifts that keep giving.

## OPTIMARA Violets

Our name is derived from two words: Optimum (meaning the best) and Usambara (the mountains in East Africa where the first African violet was discovered). Optimara is the American brand of Holtkamp Greenhouses, one of the original developers of violets as a retail-available flower. **If you've fallen in love with African Violets we suggest joining the AVSA and meeting with other local growers to trade tips, swap plants and have fun.**

## AVSA: African Violet Society of America

The African Violet Society of America Inc. (AVSA) was incorporated on June 30, 1947. Since then it has grown to be the largest society devoted to a single indoor plant in the world. It is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. AVSA is the International Cultivar Registration Authority for the genus Saintpaulia and its varieties. This registry is available to the public with the purchase of updatable software. The Society publishes a bi-monthly full-color 64-page magazine, the African Violet Magazine. It also hosts an annual public convention where growers from around the world meet to show plants, hold competitions and trade information.



## Space Violets with Continuous Blooming



## The FUTURE of AFRICAN VIOLETS

The Optimara Space Violet Program began in 1984 when Holtkamp Greenhouses launched 25,000 Optimara seeds into space in an orbiting space laboratory. These seeds orbited Earth for nearly six years. The program was conceived to test the effect of long-term exposure to cosmic radiation and lack of gravity. When the seeds



were retrieved in 1990 by the Columbia Space Shuttle, many mutations soon became apparent in the resulting finished plants. One of these mutations gives Optimara EverFloris Violets an extraordinary abundance of flowers, which never stop blooming. This Optimara variety will have at least 20 open blooms.

## Additional Credits

All Optimara varieties featured were hybridized by Reinhold Holtkamp Sr.

**Above:** EverGlory Space Violet, grown & photographed by Alcie Maxwell.

Special Thanks for assistance and advice in producing this guide: Reinhold Holtkamp Jr, Joyce Stork, Ann-Marie Keene, Sue Renkert, Darlene Allen, Jeannie M Myers, Belinda Thibodeaux, our friends at the "African Violet Nerds" facebook group, and special thanks to the African Violet Society of America, Inc. (AVSA). *AV Guide layout, research and photos - Michael A. Coleman*

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

[AVSA.org](http://AVSA.org)

[myViolet.com](http://myViolet.com)

[Wikipedia.com/Saintpaulia](http://Wikipedia.com/Saintpaulia)

[facebook.com/OPTIMARA](https://facebook.com/OPTIMARA)



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