

Activity: Propagation Goal: Cognitive Populations: All except very young and late stage dementia

TH Activity Plan – African Violet Propagation

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Materials

Mature African Violet Plant(s)
African Violet leaves (2-3 for each participant)
Flower pots - can be individual yogurt containers or 1-2.5 inch pots
African violet soil
Clear Plastic bags to place pots in
Sharp knife or blade
Water- room temperature
Gloves & wipes

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will set African violet (AV) leaves in soil to propagate new plants, practicing this propagation method.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Expand horticulture knowledge about African violet tropical plants; acquire knowledge re propagation methods used for various plants

Physical: Strengthen fine motor control; practice movements to improve hand steadiness

Psychological/Emotional: Reminisce about plants based on family experiences

Sensory: Feel the different textures of leaves; explore tactile sensitivity

Social: Communicate and engage with others discussing favorite flower colors; share observations on the progress of propagation

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

- 1. Pre-Session Preparation:** Obtain leaves for propagation. This can be from friends, purchasing leaves online, or getting leaves from a local African violet club. Do not use older leaves from the plant; they do not propagate well. The stem should be at least 1 to 2 inches long. Keep leaves fresh by wrapping the ends in damp paper towel & placing in a plastic bag. Have a sample plant(s) for display.
2. Facilitator begins session by welcoming everyone and asking participants to share any special meanings African violets have for them. The facilitator can share plant information on the numerous AV varieties, color of the flowers, textures of the leaves & care for these houseplants. Explain that propagating leaves to make more AV plants is the session's focus.
3. Prepare the soil by moistening it thoroughly, it should be uniformly damp but not soaked.
4. Recut the leaves with an angled cut. Review safety rules for sharp items.
5. Loosely fill the plant pots being careful to pack down the soil and making sure soil is moist.
6. Insert the leaf into the soil no more than an inch deep but far enough for the soil to support the leaf from falling over and touching the soil surface. The hairy surface of the leaf should be facing upwards.
7. Place pot with leaf into a plastic bag, blow some air into the bag and then seal the bag. Make sure to label the bag by flower color if using an unnamed variety or by the hybrid name if it is a named variety.
8. Place the bagged leaf in bright light but avoid putting in direct sunlight.

9. Plants will begin to propagate within 3-4 weeks and small plantlets will appear on the surface. Wait until the plantlet is the size of at least a dime before proceeding to separate babies from the mother leaf.
10. Propagation can take weeks or months depending on many factors such as condition of the leaf, light source, temperature, humidity, and the hybrid properties.
11. Once plantlets are large enough to be separated from the mother leaf, remove the clump of plantlets from the pot, setting them on their side. Tease the plantlets apart making sure that the whole new plant is separated. There should be at least two leaves per crown of plantlet.
12. Plant each plantlet in its own pot. Empty coffee pods & condiment cups (with holes in the bottom) work well for small plants. Larger plantlets can be planted in 2 inch pots. Make a hole with a pencil end to place plant in soil to prevent damage to the tender roots.
13. Gently tap soil around the plant but do not pack the soil. New plants benefit from a couple weeks of growth inside a plastic bag to help alleviate the trauma from transplanting.
14. As the plant grows it can be transplanted into a larger container but violets like to be root bound in order to bloom. Standard violets usually are grown in 3-4 inch pots, while miniature and semi-miniature varieties bloom well in 2-2.5 inch pots.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This TH activity can be a long process for some and can be divided into smaller shorter tasks and sequential sessions to suit various individuals and populations. African violets can prompt reminiscing about plants that family members have had. These popular plants are typically easy to acquire and grow from a variety of stores and many have memories of them. Intellectual cognitive goals can focus on learning propagation methods for this and other plants in the Gesneriaceae family, these able to be adapted to suit most ages and cognitive abilities with the exception of people with later stages of dementia and young children.

It may be helpful to have young plants from previous propagations to give to participants to nurture as they wait for new plants to emerge from their current efforts. This can relate to goals of nurturing and observing plant growth; one of the social goals identified is sharing plant observations. It may be relevant, and in support of expanding social engagement goals, for some populations to discuss forming an AV club to learn and share more about this plant (or others) and forming a community centered around learning, growing, and perhaps showing the plants. Local AV or plant/garden clubs may be interesting in assisting with facility-based plant clubs.

Sensory goals can be incorporated by having AV plants of differing colors, varieties and leaf textures, with the latter touched for textural stimulation. Sensory sensitivity can be addressed. The physical components of propagating AV can strengthen and maintain fine motor skills, specifically in hands.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Safe practices for handling sharp knives used for trimming should be reviewed, with close observation during session for some populations.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: African violets (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) tend to propagate faster in the spring during peak growth cycle. Tip - select middle leaves that are full grown vs. older outer leaves. Part of the gesneriad family, AV's and other members of this family can utilize similar methods of propagation. Identifying these could be an additional project for a group with the goal of stimulating cognitive abilities and for social goals creating opportunities for sharing within a group.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Bowen, L. (2023). 31 different types of African violet varieties. *EpicGardening.com*

<https://www.epicgardening.com/african-violet-varieties/>

Rose, J. (2012). Houseplants: African violets have lots of relatives. *University of California Cooperative Extension.*

<https://ucanr.edu/datastoreFiles/268-183.pdf>

Stork, K. & Stork, J. (2002). [Starting violets from leaves.](#) *African Violet Society of America.org*

Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023.