

# Don't Lose Your Crown

By Pat Hancock

The crown, or center, of an African violet is the second most important part of the plant. An argument could be made that it is the most important part of the plant. Once you lose it, the plant will probably never be the same. The growth of a plant depends on two things – the health of the root system and the health of the crown. All new growth comes from the center.

There are many reasons why the crown of a plant may become unhealthy and eventually die away. Most or all of them are controlled by the grower.

The first reason is failure to supply water and fertilizer in a regular manner. The crown leaves on the plant will become smaller and smaller when they are deprived of water and fertilizer and will eventually die.

You may also lose crowns when drops of water are sprayed or spilled into the crown area and not promptly wiped up.

Loss of the crown may also occur when plants are infested with soil mealy bugs and the root system is diminished. Treating with Marathon (Imidacloprid<sup>®</sup>) will correct this problem.

Crowns will also die when high phosphorus fertilizers are used too much. Many fertilizers that say “African Violet Fertilizer” on the label actually have a high middle number and do not adequately support the growth of the crown. Fertilizers called “Bloom Boosters” are also in this category. Neither of these is adequate for crown growth and should not be used for more than three or four weeks at most. Growing plants need nitrogen (the first

number) and should normally be fed with a fertilizer that has even numbers such as 20-20-20 or 15-16-17, etc. For wicking, I always recommend 1/8 tsp. per gallon of water up to 1/4 tsp. per gallon of water. For top or bottom watering, 1/4 tsp. per gallon of water up to 1/2 tsp. per gallon of water. *More is not always better.* Young plants may lose their crowns from too much fertilizer when the excess builds up in the crown as a reddish-brown residue.

Plants may lose their crowns when suckers that appear are not removed in a timely fashion. Suckers steal the nourishment away from the main crown and may eventually grow larger than it is, resulting in a double or triple-crown plant. When this happens, it is almost impossible to resurrect the original plant.

Most important of all is the removal of all bottom leaves and damaged leaves as the plant matures so that more growth goes to the crown. Fewer leaves to support as the plant is growing are far better than extra leaves that serve no purpose.

Lastly, blooms covering the crown for more than a short period of time (going to a show) rob that crown of the light that it requires in order to grow.

As you can see, all of these things are easily controlled by the grower. Have a plan so that plants are given water and fertilizer on a regular schedule. Take the time to cover crowns with a piece of paper towel or Kleenex<sup>®</sup> when spraying with fertilizer or insecticides. Use Marathon<sup>®</sup> when potting to prevent soil mealy bugs and remove suckers from your plants as soon as they appear. Use

even number fertilizers at all times. If you choose to use “Bloom Boosters,” do so only for a short period about three months before going to show. Learn to train blooms away from the crown so that it won’t be deprived of light. Remove all small leaves under larger leaves as the plant grows so that more nourishment goes to the crown.

Gorgeous plants come from healthy, happy crowns.