

Best AVM Articles for 2001

Velma Lewis – Grooming and Judging Trailers (Nov-Dec, 2000) p. 50

A beautifully groomed, healthy, bloom-covered trailer can be just as exciting as any “Best of Show” single crown African violet. Some growers think that trailers are too much trouble, too messy, and do not produce enough blooms. Trailers do require work – they must be groomed, but not enough blooms? Oh yes, they have plenty of blooms!

There are a few basic guidelines, when followed that yield a bountiful display of blossoms. Trailers have the same growing requirements as other violets: adequate light, food, humidity and grooming.

In order to produce blooms, trailers must be pot bound. Since there are no restrictions on the size of pots that trailers are shown in, I thought I could put a young plant in a large pot and it would keep growing and fill the pot. Not so. It just sat there looking pitiful, so I now plant my trailers in pots proportional to their size. After a time, a trailer must be potted up but not until it fills the pot completely, and some crowns hang over the rim. I have seen miniature trailers in large pots and they are beautiful, but I am unsuccessful in getting them to fill the pot while continuing to bloom, so I have settled on a size limit of five inch tub pots. That size is better for my growing situation, since I use wick watering. I lack the memory and the self discipline necessary to water them from the top. I either drown the poor things or forget them completely.

Another requirement of trailers is that all crowns must be actively growing in order to bloom, but is that not true for regular violets? I suggest that it is. As trailers grow, the tips of the crowns must be pinched out to encourage branching. On young plants, pinch out only the center, taking as few leaves as possible. On larger plants, you can cut off enough of the crown to start a new plant. Be careful to take the same size cutting from each crown so that the original plant will grow uniformly.

Recently, I took twelve cuttings from a semiminiature (‘Foxwood Trail’) and planted them all in a clear, covered plastic food container from the deli. In four to six weeks, I will set each little plant in a very small pot. What will I do with so many of the same variety? My! My! The number of potential recipients is endless, especially if I wait until they start blooming.

Grooming trailers can be a chore or it can be a pleasant activity. I choose to take the pleasure route, viewing it with the same zeal as cleaning out a closet or balancing my checkbook. There are three necessary grooming tools: tweezers, scissors and thumbnails. Trailers tend to get bad leaves all over the plant, and it is necessary to reach down into the plant with scissors or thumbnails and pluck them out. Older leaves go limp, hang over the edge of the pot and must be either cut out near the base of the plant or pulled out with a quick jerk. Tweezers are used to remove those spent blossoms or bloom stems which fingers will not reach. I thoroughly appreciate the fact that removing many leaves or just a few will not hurt the looks or symmetry of a trailer.

Taking trailers to show is easier than taking regular violets. Most trailers take up very little

room and on the way to the show they survive being crowded together better than other violets. Sometimes I stabilize my trailers by carefully inserting shish kebab sticks into the soil, remembering to remove them before judging. If a leaf is broken during transport, it is not a problem; just be sure to remove the entire remaining stem.

Judging trailers is not too different from judging other violets. Beauty is beauty, and any judge can recognize it in show-quality plants. The AVSA Judges' Handbook gives the scale of points and special notes on judging trailers. All judges should review this material before reporting for judging duty.

I offer these brief comments on judging trailers:

Form (according to variety): Trailers vary widely in form. Some trailers, such as 'Foxwood Trail' and 'West Trail' shape themselves into attractive "dome". Other trailers, 'Redwood Trail' and 'Pixie Blue' must be carefully shaped and trimmed to make them form correctly. When one side of a trailer does not conform to the desired shape, it must be trimmed to keep the crowns consistent.

Condition (cultural perfection): Neither trailers nor the pots they are in are restricted in size, but the two must be in proportion. Marred, yellow or spotted leaves are so easy to remove – the trailer deserves to be graded down on account of them. Another consideration in judging trailers is that all leaves should be uniform in size. Miniature trailers should have small leaves – unusually large leaves or crowns should be removed.

Quantity of bloom: "Most trailers are heavy bloomers," says the Handbook. That is certainly true and the blooms should be evenly distributed on the plant. If one side of the plant is not blooming, the crowns on that side must be clipped several weeks prior to the show, and that side should be turned so that it gets plenty of light. Points are deducted if the blooms are not evenly distributed.

Size, type and color of blossom: Blossoms are judged according to variety. Blossoms are sometimes larger on standard trailers than on miniature or semiminiature trailers. The color of the blossom is judged according to the variety of the trailer.

Since trailers vary as much in size, form and bloom as other violets, each one is unique and is judged according to its own merits. I am thankful that we have a standard from which to judge. I once saw a 'Pixie Blue' win Best of Show and on another occasion, I saw a much larger 'Redwood Trail' win Best of Show. It all depends on the quality of the trailers.

The African Violet Magazine (May/June 1989, page 56) has an excellent article, "Trailing African Violets", by Janice Bruns. She tells us that one successfully grown trailer will "hook" a violet grower. She says that each trailer is a new experience and each one turns out differently. I agree with her wholeheartedly and I recommend her article to anyone interested in trailers.

