

# VioletsFun

Violet Barn newsletter

December 2024 - # 130

## (Some of) What's new



**LE Oksana.** Large growing variety suitable for growing as a showplant, with striking blooms for a houseplant. Large, bright fuchsia red sdbl. stars with bright white edging. Medium green and white, serrated, pointed, variegated foliage. Standard. (limited number now available, more later).

View the website to view all of the latest listings.

## News and updates

### Happy holidays!

Our best wishes to everyone this season and for the coming new year.

### Winter shipping now in effect.

We continue to ship through winter! However, from now through end of March, we can only guarantee safe arrival when Express mail is chosen. We will ship via priority mail (less expensive), and though boxes are well insulated, priority mail is at customer's risk.

Our apologies for the current high cost of Express mail. The USPS has *greatly* increased rates for the holiday season. The shipping costs we charge are actually much *less* than actual postage costs! We are hoping rates will return a bit more to "normal" after the holidays.

### Inventory updates.

Inventory of miniature violets was updated this past week, with a couple of new listings. Standard violet inventory will be updated in the coming week.

### Our new You Tube channel.

Only one video at this time, but we plan to add more. See the presentation on dish gardens, given at our recent open house by [clicking here](#).

## A long answer to a short question on water.

*(A question sent to us) I would like to hear your thoughts on using water from a water softener. We have a well and very hard water.*

We take water for granted, so it would seem to be an uncomplicated answer but, in fact, it requires some explanation. Enough so that we'll get into it a bit more deeply here. We aren't chemists, won't pretend to be, and don't have a lab. We do have lots of experience growing plants, and lots of experience with less than ideal water, so we will try to couple what the science says with our experience.

Good" water means a few things. Proper pH, not too acidic (pH below 7) or alkaline (pH above 7), is important. Neutral (pH=7.0), or close to it, is ideal. Small amounts of minerals (calcium, magnesium, and others) will raise the pH in the water, and can be beneficial, as your plants do need some of these.

Most "tap" water drawn from municipal water systems in North America will be close to neutral or slightly alkaline and is suitable for growing plants well. Much will depend upon the source of the municipal water. If drawn from a large body of fresh water (lake or river) it's likely closer to neutral, but this can change if it is ground water drawn from wells which can be quite hard and alkaline (often the case) or soft and acidic. The small amounts of chlorine and fluoride that might be added to municipal water is rarely an issue to be concerned about. That said, you are at the mercy of your local water authorities. Their job is to make water safe for drinking, not for growing your lovely violets.

"Hard" water, high in mineral content, is a common problem for those of us in rural areas that must draw water from a well on the property. Beyond higher pH, the water itself is "hard"--literally a high amount of minerals, like calcium (mostly) and magnesium, abundant

in the soil and rock from which the water is drawn. In small amounts, these are beneficial. In larger amounts, they can cause real problems growing plants well. Very hard water, over time, can lead to "hard" plants. As the plant tissues absorb these excess minerals, leaves will be thicker and more brittle. In time, leaf edges can appear brown or "burned". Short of changing your water, the effects of hard water can be minimized by regular (every four to six months) repotting of plants into fresh soil. By refreshing the soil, you will be removing the build up of salts and minerals that have accumulated in it.

The high pH of hard water can be dealt with by adding an acid to the water. We did this for years by adding distilled vinegar to our water. We would test the water (kits can be found where fish or hydroponic supplies are sold), then add just enough vinegar to bring it to neutral. There are other products, that can raise or lower the pH, but this was cheap and easy to use. It worked well, but didn't solve the hardness problem. This would require physically removing the minerals from the water.

A water "softening" system is the most common way to do this. Depending upon the mineral (and contaminant) content of the water, the system might be more, or less, complex. In our case, the well water passes through a number of filters before being softened. Unfortunately, most softeners will use sodium (sodium chloride), which will make the softened water more acidic. This solves the problem of hardness (the excess mineral content) but creates another one. Because of the sodium content, it's typically not recommended to water your houseplants regularly (occasional use is fine) with softened water. Companies that install these systems typically advise against it.

To correct this, our softened water then passes through a "reverse osmosis" system, which removes virtually everything from the water, including any sodium that may have been added during softening. We take the extra precaution of using potassium chloride (rather than sodium), for softening, as we feel this would be less harmful for plants if there were to be trace amounts of it in the water. We also recycle much of our water, collecting it from both our air conditioning and dehumidifying systems. Water produced this way is basically "distilled" or "pure" water, without contaminants. For much of the year, we can produce much (or most) of the water we need this way--simply by "recycling" it.

Distilled or "pure" water will have no minerals in it, and freshly distilled water absorbs carbon dioxide from the air, making it a bit acidic. Correcting this is easy enough to do--just add a little (it doesn't take much) of our hard well water! We have four faucets/pipes on the wall above our 30 gallon water containers on wheels. One "cold", unfiltered, water straight from the well. One "hot", softened, water. Another, filtered, softened, RO water. Lastly a pipe that regularly spits out water recycled from the AC and dehumidifier. Once the container is full (with recycled or RO water), we will add just a bit of the well water. We rarely use the hot water, only using it if to warm up a container of water we feel is too cold to use on plants.

What about purchased, bottled water? This depends upon what is being purchased. "Spring" water is usually a bit alkaline, it can be slightly acidic as well, depending upon the source. It's still likely preferable to most water drawn from one's own well, as it's been filtered to meet FDA guidelines. Bottled distilled water will be "pure" in the sense that it will have no mineral content, and the pH should be neutral or very close to it. Keep in mind that the fewer minerals in your water, the more important it is to provide those that your plant does need in other ways. This means regularly feeding with balanced fertilizers having the needed macro and micronutrients. Most name brand, general purpose, houseplant fertilizers will provide this when used properly.

Lastly, a word on using "rain" water. Though some growers successfully use water collected outside as runoff, this can be highly risky and is not recommended for indoor plants (outside gardening is different). Rain water is only as good as the air through which it falls. It will collect dust and pollutants along the way--yes, it can, indeed, be acidic. Not to mention contaminants picked up from roofing materials, downspouts, etc. Best to save this water for your roses or vegetables.

## My plant looks like this



(A question from a customer) My order from earlier this year included Saintpaulia Sigi Falls. I have a question, as so far there have been no blooms and just grows like a large sucker. Is this a viable plant, or a sucker that won't ever bloom? I'm about to repot but not sure if pruning will help? It's so tightly packed I'm not sure how to go about it.

*Unlike other (nontrailing) African violets, the Saintpaulia species can be successfully grown, and exhibited, as either single or multiple crowned plants, as this is their natural habit in the wild. This particular species will want to grow multicrowned. Typically, violets will bloom better when grown single crowned (no suckers), but it will be very difficult to grow this one that way. Despite your best efforts, it will want to multicrown.*

*That doesn't mean it won't bloom, however. As you noticed by the plant shown on our website, it can bloom well. For us, it blooms regularly, though rarely heavily. It does look ready for repotting, as it's certainly out grown the pot we shipped it in. It's also possible that it simply needs more light--depending upon what light you get through your window and it being set back a ways from it.*

## This month's question

On your website, I see flowers described as "semidouble". What does that mean?

*One of the defining characteristics of African violet species (Saintpaulia) are five-petaled blooms. These are referred to as "single" blooms--i.e. a single row of five petals. "Double" is used to describe blooms with double the number (10 or more) petals on the typical bloom. Some of the more unusual varieties can have many more petals. "Semidouble" is a term to describe blooms with more than five petals, but not quite double, i.e. six to nine.*

*Of course, these are just general guidelines used to describe the flowering habit of the variety. Genetic variability, environment, and care, make them less than always exact descriptions. A "double" flower may sometimes have less than ten petals, and a "semidouble" bloom may sometimes show only five petals. The terms are used to describe the typical bloom on a representative example of the variety.*

## Calendar

### March 2025.

Next international shipping. Sorry, due to weather and the holidays, we are not shipping internationally during winter months. We will resume next spring.

## Contact us

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*Sorry, we're currently closed to visitors  
Come to our Open house in October!*

## Notes



### Follow us on facebook!

### We want you to succeed!

Plant not growing well? Don't wait until it's too late. Send us a photo and an outline of care and environment. You are not alone--perhaps we can help.

### Having success?

Let us know and share your story.

### Write a review to get a free plant

Write a review on the product pages of our website before ordering. Get a free plant added to your order.

### Place a pickup order!

For those in the area, we offer pickup service. Save on shipping and we'll have your plants waiting for you.

[More info...](#)

## Are you a member?

### African Violet Society of America

Sign up through our website and get a free plant added to order! More info: [avsa.org](http://avsa.org)

### Gesneriad Society

Has your collection grown far beyond violets? Consider joining the Gesneriad Society. More info: [gesneriad.society.org](http://gesneriad.society.org)

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, simply click on the following link [Unsubscribe](#).

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