

For its 2023-2024 project, the Annapolis Valley African Violet Society (AVAVS) members decided to grow out seedlings started in 2022 by member Frances Shilliday, using Canadian hybridizer Carol Eros' seeds given to Frances by Patti Vaison, another member of AVAVS. Unfortunately, the parent varieties used in these seeds' crosses is unknown.



Frances Shilliday and seedlings grown from Morgan's seeds

Frances demonstrated how to prepare the soil, sieving out lumps to have a fine propagating mix in a polystyrene container. Frances explained that this type of container seems to prevent damping off.

Frances doesn't spray water on the soil as that would leave the surface extra damp. The soil is mixed first in a bucket with warm water to determine the exact dampness. Frances emphasized to have it only just damp, almost like clothes that have been spun dry. Having the correct dampness is key to germination success.

The seed was distributed over the soil from a folded piece of white paper. After this, the dome was placed over the mixture; no more water or soil is added until seedlings sprout. Only if necessary, use a dropper to water the seedlings.

NOTE: A question was asked about the shelf life for seeds; Frances said that younger seed is better for growth.

Once seedlings are large enough, pick out individual seedlings with a toothpick and plant a few together in a container. Once the seedlings are a significant size, separate them once again into individual containers.

At this point, Frances cautioned us to not overwater the seedlings or they will rot. Use a dropper to water the seedlings, avoiding getting the leaves wet.

Once the seedlings are transplanted into their separate containers, it becomes a matter of wait-and-see. Once the seedlings bloom, a decision is made as to which seedlings to keep. Points to bear in mind when making this decision are:

- Peduncles – are they strong and upright, or are they floppy
- Blossoms – number per peduncle
 - Color such as creamy yellow
 - Edged
 - Droppers or stick-tight
- Leaves – Standard or variegated, form such as wasp, chimera
- Growth Habit – symmetrical form is optimum



Once you decide which seedlings you are going to keep, the next step is to grow them vegetatively through three generations to ensure that the new plants grow true to the original seedling's characteristics.

As well as discussing growing African Violet hybrids from seeds, Frances also discussed pollinating African Violet species to create a seed pod. Once the pod is brown and dry, small seeds can be harvested and sown to grow more plants.



species Shumensis seed pod



Seedlings grown from seed from a ripened seed pod

This presentation did not discuss hybridization as such. If members are interested in researching this subject, the publication African Violet Magazine has published many informative articles that members can read.

Thanks go to Frances Shilliday for presenting the program, and to Dixie Cress, the AVAVS member responsible for this report's photographs.