

Sowing Seed **by Dale Martens**

- 1. Find a smallish, clear plastic container with a clear lid. Put about 1/2 an inch of moist, not soaking wet vermiculite/perlite in the bottom and then on top of that put a half inch to one inch of moist, not soaking wet, African Violet soil or peat from a peat pellet. Use only distilled water or tap water to moisten the soil. Don't use fertilized water. Tamp the soil down so that it is level and air pockets have been dislodged. You'll need a minimum of 1-1/2 inches from the top of the soil to the container's lid for the seedlings. Remember the label you made when you first crossed the mother plant? Add the date you sowed the seeds and put that in the container. If the container is large enough for more than one batch of seeds, then have the writing face the seeds sown. I frequently have 5 or more seed batches growing in one container.**
- 2. Take a five inch or so white piece of paper and crease it down the center. This is to make it easier for you, when sowing your seed.**
- 3. Your seedpod should be brown and partially split at this stage. Slit it open further, over the piece of creased, white paper. Make sure you scratch all the seeds out of the seedpod. I use a sewing needle or toothpick.**
- 4. Gently pick up the white paper and hold it at an angle, so you will be able to distribute the seed evenly into your prepared seed container.**
- 5. It is advisable not to sow all your seed at once for a couple of reasons. One is that something awful might happen to the seedlings (drought, algae) and the other is that there's going to be a zillion seeds! Store the rest of the seed in the refrigerator. I prefer to sow enough seed for about 30 plants.**
- 6. Tap the side of the paper holding the seed over the moist soil and try to scatter the seeds. If you tap gently, you will find that just a few seeds will go down to the edge of the paper and you can place them more or less where you want.**
- 7. Snap the clear lid on to the container.**

8. Place the seed box under your lights about 6 inches to 10 inches below the tubes.

9. If you are growing under natural light only, make sure that no direct sunlight falls on the seed container which will bake your seeds. Also when growing under natural light, the reservoir will form green algae much more quickly.

11. The seeds will start to germinate within 12 - 30 days, some might take longer, so do not be in a hurry to dispose of the seed container. Just leave it where it is and be patient a while longer. Seed from species can take a couple of months to sprout. Variegated seedlings may take about 30 days to sprout, so don't be disappointed too much if you don't see variegation right away on the seedlings that have a variegated parent. Do check the container for moisture, since you don't want it to dry out while you're waiting to see sprouts. Add only distilled or tap water, don't add fertilized water.

12. Don't forget to take notes as to what date you sowed the seed and how long they took to germinate. It's easier if you add the date of sprouting to that label that gives the parentage. All of your information is on that label. As soon as the seedlings are transplanted, you might transfer the information to a 3 x 5 index card.

Transplanting:

1. I prefer to transplant seedlings often. One can get a blooming plant from a sprouting strep seed in 4-1/2 months if the strep seedling is transplanted often to stimulate growth.

2. Use an African Violet "baby mix" of 50% AV mix and 50% vermiculite. Make sure it's moist, not soaking wet. Use a similar container like you did for sowing seed. You'll need a lid for the container.

3. When the seedlings are 7 days old, use a wooden toothpick to lift the seedlings. Gently pull each seedling apart from its neighbors. If there's a

grouping of seedlings that seem all stuck together, then put that group in a shallow dish of water and use two toothpicks to swish the water and to help separate them. Even if the roots come off, plant the seedling anyway. You may plant the seedlings about 1/4 inch apart. That's plenty of room for each to grow for the next two weeks.

4. If you have sown variegated seed or species seed, be sure to keep the original container after you have removed all visible seedlings, and make sure it doesn't dry out. Check it once a week to look for new sprouts.

5. Two weeks after that first transplanting, take a 2-1/2 inch square pot and put wicks on each. Use the "baby mix" again. Then put 9 seedlings in that pot, 3 rows, 3 across. No need this time for a lid or 100% humidity. Just make sure your wicks are working. It's easier for me to put lots of square pots in one of those rectangular, black trays and water them as a group rather than on individual reservoirs. Use a balanced fertilizer at the rate of 1/8 teaspoon per gallon of water.

6. Two weeks later, lift up each seedling and plop it down in that same pot. That's all!

7. After another two weeks, now it's a judgement call as to how many seedlings remain in that 2-1/2 inch pot. You should have at least 2 or 3. Caution: don't ever bury a strep seedling (or mature plant!) lower in the pot than it was previously grown. It's not an African violet! Be careful about this, please.

8. Another 2 weeks has gone by. This time perhaps each seedling gets its own 2-1/2 inch pot. I never give a seedling a larger pot than that until it blooms and proves it is worth keeping. At this time you may use whatever mix you prefer to use for an adult strep.

9. All white, or almost all white seedlings rarely live. You can try high nitrogen fertilizer at the rate of 1/8 teaspoon per gallon of water, but I've not found that to be very successful.

~ Dale Martens.