

How to Care for Your Streptocarpus Plant(s).

Streptocarpus are indoor house plants that need growing conditions that are very similar to those of African Violets, but there are some differences.

Light: Streptocarpus need bright light to flower well. They grow exceptionally well in sunny windows as long as the sun doesn't get too hot—a sheer curtain will diffuse the light. If all of the leaves are rather yellowish and the flowers are bleached, the plants are getting too much light, or they have a problem with the roots or nutrition. Insufficient light will result in large thin, dark green leaves and few flowers. If you grow the plants under fluorescent tubes, use a fixture with four tubes, placed just above the plants.

Temperatures: Streptocarpus can tolerate much cooler conditions than those tolerated by African Violets. However, they do not grow or flower well when grown cool. They grow and flower best at room temperature. Like African Violets, they suffer when temperatures exceed 80 degrees F.

Watering and Fertilizer: It is best to fertilize with a commercial general-purpose water-soluble fertilizer at the rate of 1/8 tsp/gal every time you water. The brand is not important, as long as it dissolves easily. Avoid “bloom booster” fertilizers. Use rainwater or reverse-osmosis water if possible, to avoid the buildup of salts in the potting mix. Unlike African Violets, overhead watering does not bother the leaves, as long as the plant will not be in direct sun before it dries off. I do not recommend wick-watering for any plant, especially streptocarpus. They must dry out almost completely between waterings to grow their best. If you have a large number of plants, put plants of similar size –with similar size pots—on a tray together. All of them should dry out at about the same rate. That way, you can water the tray, instead of the individual pots. Do not leave plants standing in water that they cannot absorb within an hour. All newly potted or repotted plants should be watered from above until they have grown a few new leaves. This prevents salt-burn around the growing points of the plant, which may not have grown up above the soil surface yet.

Potting: Avoid exceeding a 4-inch pot, even for a large show plant. Use plastic pots with ample drainage holes. Keep the growing points of the plant (crown) at the surface of the potting medium. Potting materials deteriorate within about nine months, causing the health of the plant to decline, so you need to repot periodically. A small plant can be repotted to a larger pot—up to 4 inches. To repot a plant that is already in a 4-inch pot or larger, look for the youngest emerging leaves. Take a knife and cut behind these to release a 3-leaf front lead from the plant. Shorten the longest roots and remove all of the potting material. Remove even the smallest flower buds and trim the leaves to 3” long. Plant the 3-leaf lead in the smallest pot you can get it into comfortably, remembering to keep the growing point near the surface—you may need to tie the leaves to a stake for stability if there are only a few stubby roots on the lead division. The potting medium should be moist, not wet, and the plant should not wobble. Put a plastic bag over the plant and secure inside a second pot placed below the plant. Wait until you see root action and/or leaf growth before removing the bag (about three weeks). Avoid placing bagged plants in sunlight, to avoid overheating. Expect the plant to wilt and look poor while it is rooting. Use a commercial peat-perlite (may contain bark, but not soil) mix that has ample perlite (you will likely need to add some perlite). Alter a commercial mix, instead of mixing your own, to reduce the chance of nutrient deficiencies and pH problems.

Grooming: Leaves may be made shorter or narrower at any time with a scissors. Just trim them so the plant has nice shape. This is good for the plant, for it causes it to produce additional leaves, which will result in additional flowers. A plant with many shorter leaves will likely bloom more profusely than a plant with a few long leaves, even in they have the same leave area. Large plants will have many old leaves that are no longer producing flowering stems—such leaves should be removed. This causes the plant to produce more young leaves, and thus more flowers. Spent flower stems should be removed with a scissors near their base.