

GESNERIADS

Related group of plants belonging to the Gesneriaceae Family, comprising over 100 genera and 2000 species. Native to tropic regions and can be found growing as terrestrials (plants living or growing in the ground in soil) and as epiphytes (plants growing on tree branches, trunks or other living supports, but not parasitic). Plants are primarily "flowering plants", cultivated for their large, showy and tubular flowers, although some also have very attractive foliage.

GENERAL CULTURAL REQUIREMENTS:

Media

Light

- Natural
- Artificial light

Temperature

Water

- Wick watering is ideal for several gesneriads

Classification of these plants often based on *growth habit and type of *root system:

1. Fibrous-rooted types:

African Violets (*Saintpaulia*)

- most well known and favorite plant in family
- plants have trailing and rosette growth habit (crowded, circular cluster of leaves radiating from the crown and close to the surface of medium)

Cape Primrose (*Streptocarpus*)

- native to S. Africa and Madagascar; first cultivated in Europe in 1824
- some types upright, others stemless (acaulescent)
- plants are unique in that the flower stalks emerge directly from the base of the stemless leaves As leaves

age, no more flowers arise and old leaves can be removed to improve plant appearance.

- Propagation - unique leaf cuttings (see handout sheet); remove mid-vein and place full leaf or leaf sections length-wise in medium. Young rooted plantlets will develop along cut surface of leaf and can be removed and potted up after sufficient growth.

Episcias

- plants thrive in high humidity environments (excellent in terraria)
- growth habit tends to be trailing, so are suitable in hanging baskets; also good for dish gardens

2. Types with fleshy “**tubers**” (thick, fleshy underground, modified stem adapted for food storage during dormant dry season - can be used for propagation):

- plants are **not everblooming** and require dormancy period for long term growth
- most common and well known plant in this group is *Sinningia* (sometimes referred by old name of Gloxinia)
- miniature *Sinningias*, which are hybrids of the traditional large *Sinningias* and other species, are currently very popular.

3. Types with scaly “rhizomes” (underground modified stem structure composed of tiny leaflets or scales bunched together, resembling small pine or fir cones):

- most common and well known plant in group is *Achimenes*, whose culture is similar to older *Sinningias*, including dormancy requirement
- *Achimenes* have bushy growth habit, if pinched when plants are young, and often used in hanging baskets; some types have attractive foliage as well

4. Less well known mix of different genera of gesneriads:

- Lipstick plant (*Aeschynanthus*)
- Goldfish and Guppy plants (*Nematanthus* and *Columneas*)

All are epiphytes in the wild and are very viney and are best pinched to stimulate branching.

