

Growing 'em TEXAS Size

by

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At a time when new and beautiful miniatures are being shown in ever-increasing numbers, I still believe that nothing is more spectacular than a large standard show plant. I have always liked the large varieties, so for quite some time, I have worked to increase their size for show. At the LSAVC Show in College Station last year (1987), I entered a collection of standards – “Pink Energy”, “Splendiferous”, and “Fredette’s Strawberry Ripples” – all 30 – 32 inches across. Since then, the most frequently asked question has been: “How do you grow them so large?”.

I do not hold myself out to be an expert, but when asked by our editor for an article, I was pleased to share my method.

- 1) Begin with selection of the right variety. Hybrids with the potential to grow large are needed. They should have track records as winners, but most importantly, the plant must respond to your conditions. More than one new variety I have tried has gone on the sales table when it just didn’t like my way of growing.
2. Begin with two or three starts of the same plant. I normally grow out two of each show plant. The best one goes to show. All of my show plants were grown out from leaves so that each has been in my conditions from the plantlet stage on.
3. Perhaps the most critical factor is repotting. I pot up rapidly – every 2 – 3 months – using increasingly larger pots. By potting up from 2 “ to 3 “ (or 4”) to 4 “ pots, there is no danger of losing the outer leaves to aging, which I believe is promoted by being root bound. Baby leaves, of course, are removed as early as possible, as I want all of the plant’s energy put into normal foliage. Letting a plant get root bound does promote blooming, but heavy blooming is more likely to produce growth cycles or uneven leaves. Being root bound can also reduce the plant’s ability to use nutrients.
4. I disbud for 5 – 6 months, stopping six weeks before show on show plants. Working with each plant this way also allows regular grooming each week.
5. □ fertilize with Rapid-Grow (1/2 teaspoon per gallon) during the period of disbudding. This high nitrogen fertilizer helps in foliage production at a time when I am directing the plant’s energy to foliage. I return to Peter’s African Violet Special 12-36-14 when disbudding stops and for all small plants. I find that Peter’s Variegated Special 5-50-17 makes a good bloom booster when used beginning four weeks before show.
(□ Author’s Note: Since this article was originally written, Rapid-Gro has been taken off the market following a buy-out by another fertilizer company. The formula of Peter’s African Violet Special has been changed to include a higher urea level. I no longer use it. I have substituted Optimara fertilizer.)
6. My soil is a fairly standard soilless mix (from a recipe originally by Howard Utz), which is very light. All of my plants being grown for show are individually wicked (with #36 nylon twine) into 16 or 32 oz. Containers.
7. Finally, consider lights. I have always read that too much light makes smaller leaves and shorter petioles. I reasoned that the reverse might be true and it seems to be. I reduce light during disbudding to 9 – 10 hours and then increase again before show. The size of each leaf increases. Of course, the amount of light you need may vary according to conditions.
8. Though most plants are mature in 12 – 18 months, I usually show them at two years.

If you try some of these suggestions, I wish you the best of success. I will look forward to seeing even more standards at the next show.

Once you have one of these Texas size standards, you’ll be hooked!

