

June Swift - Texas Hybridizer
Interview with June Swift, April, 2004
by Margery Clive

MC: When and where were you introduced to African violets?

JS: My sister, Charlyne Reed, brought me 13 violets when she and her husband, Ralph, came to the Dallas violet convention in 1963 or 1964 (can't remember for sure which year). Charlyne started a little violet business, so I did the same thing and grew violets for florists to sell.

MC: What experiences led you to hybridizing?

JS: When I attended the AVSA National Conventions (my first convention was in Miami in 1966), I saw so many new and interesting violets beginning to be developed, I decided to try it myself.

MC: Have your growing techniques changed over the years?

JS: My growing techniques have changed very little over the 40 years I have been growing. I have always used a vacuum system flower pot for both leaves and plants - not wicks.

MC: At what point did you decide to go into business?

JS: I decided to sell large plants to florists. However, in about 1972, I decided to rent a space in the Casa View Shopping Center (in East Dallas) and I grew all my plants there. I stayed in that space for 6 years, later selling the shop to Susan Whitaker, who did some hybridizing of her own. She had been a good customer before I sold the shop to her.

MC: What led to the development of the Moist Rite?

JS: We were using the Aquamatic Planter for all our growing (also a vacuum system). The company more or less went out of business and we could no longer depend on them for planters. Therefore, we decided to develop a pot with a little different way of drawing water. Jack drew up the plans and we had the mold made. Cary Products, the plastic company, has produced our planter for us the entire time. Mr. Cary later told us that he, at first, laughed to himself thinking that we would never sell enough to pay for the mold, (which incidentally cost about \$10,000 at the time). A new mold at today's price would cost about \$35,000! We certainly would have to sell a bunch to pay for that.

MC: I understand that for many years you were the recipient of the Best Display Table award at the national conventions. What kind of planning went into being recognized for such continued excellence?

JS: We took plants to the conventions for many years and had a display table. For the first few years, we took 25 large standard plants, our own shelving, our own draping for the table, our own signage, and had to do some staging. Later, we only had to take 15 large plants and the convention furnished the shelves and signs. Staging was eventually discontinued.

We won quite a few awards in several different categories: Best in Horticulture, some for Best, or 2nd/3rd Best New Introductions, and some for Best Overall Display Table. Over the years, we attended 30 conventions; lots of work, but lots of fun.

MC: Talk about your favorite hybrid.

JS: I guess my most favorite hybrid is 'Dumplin' and I still grow it. I have only a few of my hybrids that I still grow

MC: Tell me about your most famous hybrids.

JS: I guess maybe 'Dumplin', 'Cotton Bowl', 'Cat's Meow', 'Betcha', and a few others I can't remember off hand. . . all made the Favorites List for a number of years. I have always taken 'Dumplin' to sell at each convention in the last few years. A number of people would say they used to have it, and would buy a new start from us.

MC: Please offer our members 10 key points that can help them become better growers:

1. If you are having good luck with your plants, just keep on with the same methods. Don't do everything you hear other people say they do.
2. Watch your plants every few days to see if the planters need to be refilled.
3. If you should see any evidence of soil mealy bugs, destroy all plants involved. Do not try to eradicate them. Some other types of insects can be properly eliminated.
4. Don't switch around plant food if your plants like what you have been using.
5. Try to avoid mildew; seems it likes to show up on certain varieties of plants. I use a mix of Lysol concentrate disinfectant mixed with warm water. It doesn't seem to damage the leaves, but it may spot the blossoms. Lysol does a good job on mildew.
6. Never repot just for the sake of repotting. If your plant is doing well, and doesn't have a neck on it that requires repotting, just leave it alone.
7. If you have a variety that takes up space and just doesn't grow well in your growing environment, throw it away and replace it with something that does well in your space.
8. Occasionally, take all the plants off each shelf. Wash the shelves well with water containing a little bleach.
9. If your plants seem dusty or if you spill dirt on them, use a soft brush to clean them off. If that doesn't do the job, take them to the sink and spray them with warm water. As long as the water is warm and they do not dry in the sun, the water will not spot the leaves. I usually do this when the lights are on as the plants probably dry quicker.
10. Enjoy your plants. Don't get so many that they are a job and not a pleasure.