

Creating Texas Hybrids: Gesneriads

Dale Martens

DaleMartens@mchsi.com

As some of you may know, we have moved to the Midwest in order to retire near our families. Otherwise, we'd have been more than happy to stay in Texas! I was going to list individuals I particularly thought were kind to me, but then I started bawling like a baby. So I'm just going to say thank you to all of you for making my adventure in Texas a warm and welcome one. I thoroughly enjoyed the Lone Star African Violet Council conventions each year! I'd tell my friends how the Texas growers were such fun at these annual shows.

I was thrilled when LSAVC voted to have a list of Texas Hybrids for Gesneriads! I enthusiastically added several gesneriads to that list, honoring Texas by giving most of my hybrids the "alpha" name of Texas, such as *Sinningia* 'Texas Zebra' and *xAchimena* 'Texas Polar Bear'. All of the variegated streps with the 'Ice' or 'Iced' first name are Texas Hybridized including *Streptocarpus* 'Iced Texas Twilight' and 'Iced Pink Flamingo'.

I'm hoping more than one of you jumps into hybridizing gesneriads in order to add to the Texas Hybrid list. Here are some tips for hybridizing gesneriads:

Sinningias

- 1) Fertilize the flower on the 4th day the flower is open.
- 2) Seed pod maturation is only about 30 days when it turns brown and splits.
- 3) If seedlings are transplanted every 2 weeks after sprouting for the first 8 weeks of life, you will see them grow so fast they'll be blooming in about 5 months. This means 2 generations in a year.

Episcias

- 1) Fertilize the flower on the 3rd day the flower is open.
- 2) High humidity is needed for fruit production, so place the plant in a terrarium environment. After pollinating the plant, I put smallish plants under a dome to help increase humidity. It forms a smallish berry that is initially whitish in color. It matures in 60 days.
- 3) The seedlings prefer high humidity to mature and they, too, appreciate transplanting every 2 weeks for the first 8 weeks of life.

Streptocarpus

- 1) Fertilize the flower on the 5th through 7th day the flower is open.
- 2) A very long, green seed pod will form and it takes 8 to 12 weeks before it turns brown and begins to untwist.
- 3) Germination is slower: about 2 to 4 weeks, and for variegated seedlings, they may not sprout for 4 to 8 weeks.

In all cases, sow gesneriad seed on top of a 50-50 mix of vermiculite and your normal African violet soil. Don't cover the seeds with more soil. It's best to use a smallish, clear plastic container with a clear lid. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that gesneriads prefer to be transplanted often. I begin when the seedlings are only 3 days old and put 9 seedlings in a 2-1/2 inch square pot. Then I transplant every 2 weeks for the first 8 weeks. You'll see them grow quickly before your eyes!