

## Repotting African Violets

*By Carolee Carter*

Repotting your African violets should be a regular part of your basic care to these plants. While the plants love to be root-bound in their pots, there comes a time when the potting mix becomes stale, fertilizer salts accumulate and the mix no longer provides the roots with nutrients. Additionally, as your plant ages, the lower row of leaves eventually dies. As you remove those leaves, a "neck" will begin to appear on the plant. Once you repot and sink that neck below the surface of the mix, new roots will be formed around the neck, giving the plant a boost of energy.

**Here's what you do:** remove the plant from the pot. Inspect the roots for any damage. They should be grayish or whitish in color, not brown and mushy, which indicates that the soil has been kept too wet. Remove any older, yellowing leaves. Then remove any soil that easily falls off in your hands. If there is a neck, cut off an equal portion of soil from the bottom of the plant so that when you replace the plant in the pot you can "sink" it up to the bottom row of leaves. Generally, the size of the pot should be no larger than one-third the size of the diameter of the plant. Most standard-size plants do well in 4-inch pots. Some of the very large standards can be potted into a 5- or 6-inch pot. If you are using the same pot, make sure that you scrub all of the debris from inside the pot before you replace the plant into it.

Most of the commercial African violet soil mixes on the market are fine. Open the bag and put the mix in a lidded container. Mix some tepid water into the mix until it feels damp to the touch. Depending on your watering methods, you should add some perlite to the mix to "lighten" it up. If you are top or bottom watering you would not add as much as you would if you have your plants in those attractive china automatic watering containers that are so popular today. Start with 2/3rds mix to 1/3rd perlite. Once you've watered the plant, pick it up to see if it feels heavy. You'll know after experimenting whether the mix is the right consistency. The roots of African violets need to be able to move readily through the mix, and if it becomes too heavy from water, it may impede the roots' progress to the sides of the pot.

Now to the actual repotting: Put about a half-inch of mix in the bottom of the pot, then place the plant in the pot and fill around the sides and up to the bottom row of leaves, which should now be sitting just above the rim. Once the repotting has been completed, water the plant lightly.