

How to Start an African Violet from a Leaf Cutting

You can use one leaf of an African violet to start a duplicate plant (or plants) of that variety. The process usually takes 8 – 12 months from cutting to first bloom. A leaf cutting will first produce roots followed closely by tiny leaves. It is very common for a single leaf cutting to produce multiple plants.

Start with the most healthy, vigorous looking leaf possible. Faded, wilted, or blemished looking leaves usually don't reproduce as well, if at all. Most experienced violet growers start leaf cuttings in a mixture of vermiculite and perlite. Some add peat moss to the above ingredients. Your favorite African violet potting soil can also be used to start cuttings. You can also start a leaf in water.



Choose a healthy looking, nearly full sized leaf and break it off as closely as possible to the center of the plant. Cut off the leaf stem at a distance of ½ " to 1" below the flat, heart-shaped, main part of the leaf. The roots and baby plants will form at the very end tip of the leaf stem. If you want to watch the formation of the roots and eventually the baby violets as they develop you can start the cutting in water in a small jar or glass. Fill a small jar or glass with water, wrap the opening with aluminum foil, poke a hole through the foil with a pencil and then insert the stem down into the water. The main part of the leaf will rest on the foil. Keep the water level high enough to cover the lower 1" of the stem. Keep the cutting in bright, but indirect light. Change the water weekly and be patient. In several weeks roots will develop followed eventually by tiny green leaves. At this point remove the cutting from the water and pot it in a pot no larger than 3" in diameter.

Bury the roots and tiny leaves 1/2 " to 1" deep. As you plant tilt the stem to a 45-degree angle down into the soil mix relative to the surface of the soil. By planting the cutting at such an angle you ensure that the baby plants don't grow in the shade of the mother leaf, but rather out where they will get the benefit of the available light. Do not bury the main part of the leaf itself. If you started with the leaf stem short, then when you insert the rooted cutting into the soil mix at an angle it won't be too deeply buried. The deeper the lower rooted end of the cutting is buried the longer it will take the baby plants to grow up to the soil surface. Try not to position the



embryonic plantlets deeper than 1" below the soil surface.

You can eliminate the step of having to pot up the cutting once it has rooted in water by starting the cutting directly in potting mix. After making the cut in the stem simply insert it down at a 45 degree angle into a 2 ½ " or 3" pot filled with damp potting mix. African violets tend to root very readily unlike many plants with more woody stems. If you have rooting hormone on hand you can lightly brush it onto the end of your cutting, but most growers find it unnecessary to use a rooting stimulant.



In places where the humidity is naturally low you will need to boost the humidity level to speed the development of the plants. This is easily achieved by putting the cutting (pot and all) inside an appropriately sized plastic bag that can be resealed. Continue growing in bright, but indirect daylight or under fluorescent lights. Open the bag weekly to check that the soil is damp. It is unlikely that you will need to add water to the soil mix more often than every two weeks. Reseal the plastic bag after checking for water. In a few

weeks the baby plants should poke through the soil. Be patient. Varieties with very double blooms, very ruffled leaves, and or variegated leaves can take much longer. If the original leaf that you can see above the soil still looks healthy it will probably sprout given time. Don't use any fertilizer on your cutting until the babies sprout through the soil. Thereafter you can use your favorite brand of violet fertilizer at every watering, but at only one-half of the dosage recommended on the label.

When the babies finally pop up you can take the pot out of the plastic bag. They are ready to start growing and don't need the protection of the plastic bag any longer. To hasten the development of the baby



plants cut off the top third of the original "mother" leaf. You will be removing the pointed end. Leave the rest of the leaf, stem and babies growing in the pot. By removing the pointed end you are changing the growth point from the mother leaf to the baby plants. The stem of the mother leaf and to some extent the blade of the leaf also will continue to grow to some degree. The point now is to get the baby plants large enough to pot each one in its own pot. After several months of growing the baby plants will be large enough to consider separating them from each other. If you see multiple nickel sized leaves on the baby plants you can evaluate further to determine if the plantlets can be separated. If no leaves on the baby plants look as large as a nickel then wait a few more weeks before proceeding with the separation.

An individual plantlet is large enough to survive on its own if it has at least four nickel sized or larger leaves.



A plantlet of such a size will have a root system well enough established to sustain the plant. If your leaf cutting has produced only one plantlet it is easy to tell when it is large enough for separation. Usually, however, there is a tangled jumble of baby leaves and you will need to gently unpot the clump and untangle the young leaves from each other to see which rosettes of leaves are suitably sized for separation. Each plantlet will be connected to the end of the mother leaf. After deciding which babies are large enough to separate gently grasp them one by one and slowly pull downward and away from the mother leaf. The best place to grasp each plantlet is between their leaf system and their root system along that short section of stem.



Pot each baby plant in its own pot that is no larger than 2 1/2 " in diameter.

Bury the root system down in the soil to a depth such that the lowest most leaf of the baby plant just grazes the soil surface. Water each little pot lightly. Assuming the soil is moist when you are using it for potting you will be adding only 1 or 2 Tablespoonfuls of water to each pot. Baby violets can be wobbly so gently firm the soil around them.



You may need to stake them upright using plastic tooth picks or swizzle sticks until the roots grab hold of the soil. Once again use a re-closeable plastic bag to tent the baby plants for several weeks. The boost in humidity will get the young plants off to a stronger start. Add water to the soil very sparingly when the plantlets are enclosed in the plastic bags.



In many instances the original "mother" leaf will still be viable and may have plantlets that are too small to be removed. You can replant the mother leaf and her babies and allow them to grow more if you wish. After potting the leaf with small babies back up you may need to tent them in plastic again for a time.

As the young violet grows to a larger diameter you will replant it into successively larger pots. A common rule used to determine pot size relative to plant size is to measure the distance across the entire plant and divide that figure by three. For example a plant with a 9" diameter should grow in a 3" diameter pot, a 12" plant, in a 4" pot. This use of relatively small pots usually results in the plants beginning to bloom at a younger age because the roots are suitably crowded. If you pot a young violet in too large a pot to start with you will wait longer for blooms because the plant will first work at growing roots to fill the pot.

So, may all of your leaf cuttings sprout and may they provide only as many baby violets as you have room to grow them or friends to whom to give them.

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