



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from chapter newsletters, our journal *Gesneriads*, and original sources)

Volume 7, Number 2

February 2016

Welcome to the latest issue of **Gleanings**! This issue includes photos of *Fieldia australis* from Andy Kuang, a reprint of Bob Stewart's article on *Fieldia australis*, information about the next webinars, and Dale Martens' article on *Sinningias*. Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**!

Mel Grice, Editor



Andy Kuang of Melbourne, Australia, sent these photos of his hybrid *Petrocosmea* 'Stone Amethyst'. It is a cross of *P. parryorum* and *P. nervosa*. See more photos from Australia on the following pages.



Fieldia australis in the wild

(photos on following four pages by Andy Kuang)

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Melbourne, Australia



"*Fieldia australis* occurs naturally in the rainforest in south-eastern Australia. I found it growing up the trunks of the tree ferns and myrtle beech here in the Tarra-Bulga National Park in Victoria, Australia." – Andy Kuang

Fieldia australis

Bob Stewart aeschynanthus@verizon.net
Stow, MA

While on a business trip to California in October of 1992, I visited a commercial orchid grower who formerly grew gesneriads. I happened to notice an odd-looking plant in a corner of the greenhouse and asked what it was. He told me that the plant was *Fieldia australis*, and that he was getting rid of it to make room for more orchids. He offered cuttings, which I quickly accepted. I brought the cuttings home, a few of them took, and the plant has made another step on its journey. It is now as far as it can get from its homeland (at least, without using rocket boosters).





Fieldia australis has small thin soft-green leaves on self-branching twigs. The leaves are about 5cm long and 2.5cm wide. The overall effect of the foliage is gentle and spreading; the leaves are neither sparse nor dense on the branches. Some people report that they have seen it tending to climb, but ours grows almost exclusively horizontally.

Flowering season tends to be May through August. Flowers are produced singly in the leaf axils. The flowers are almost white, with a slight creamy or greenish tinge. They are about 3cm long and 1cm across, urn-shaped, and hang with the opening vertically downwards. The flower does not have a columnea-style hood, in fact it looks almost rotationally symmetric. There are four stamens. The stamens and stigma are arranged so that each lines up with one of the sinuses between the corolla lobes.



Unlike most gesneriads, *Fieldia australis* has noticeable bracts. (Bracts are essentially leaves that grow on flower stalks.) In the case of *Fieldia*, there is a pair of bracts that envelop the developing bud giving it the appearance of a small green tadpole. As the flower opens, the bracts lie tightly against the calyx and are not conspicuous. If the flower is fertilized the bracts turn brown and fall off, while the calyx remains green and encloses the developing fruit.



The fruit is somewhat like a columnea fruit in appearance. When ripe, the calyx folds back to expose the berry. The skin of the fruit is white, but tends to become transparent, and the black seeds within can be seen through the skin.

Despite appearances, this plant is not a columnea with white flowers! The chromosome number is 48 (*Columnea* is 9). The genus *Fieldia* is in the relatively small (about 18 species) subfamily *Coronantheroideae*, so it is more closely related to *Sarmienta*, *Mitraria*, *Negria*, and other even-less-well-known plants, than it is to *Columnea*. The plants in this subfamily come from southern Chile, the Pacific Islands, and the Australian region. Plants in this subfamily generally grow in cool and moist conditions.

Fieldia australis occurs naturally in Australia, along creeks in the mountains near the eastern coast. Although those of us who have seen too many movies involving crocodile wrestlers may picture



Australia as largely semi-desert dotted with deadly water holes, the eastern coast actually gets reasonable rainfall and can be quite pleasant. The conditions in the home range of this plant are moderate to cool temperatures, with moderate rainfall relatively evenly distributed throughout the year. Snow occurs occasionally in the habitat.

If your conditions are too hot for streptocarpus, this is not the plant for you. We grow the plant in the cool section of our greenhouse. We use shade cloth, strong ventilation, and an evaporative cooler in the summer to keep temperatures as low as possible. Low night temperature is particularly important for plants that want cool conditions. In the winter we set the thermostat to allow temperatures down to about 50°F before the heat comes on. I suspect that *Fieldia* will tolerate considerably cooler temperatures, but other plants in the room might not. I have not tested the plant under warmer conditions, but I have had a report from Sue Hodges in Australia, who says that the plant will not grow in Sydney, just over a one-hour drive from its natural habitat, because the summer temperatures are too high. (Sydney is at sea level on the coast, and considerably hotter than the mountains.)

This species is rather slow growing, and slow to root from cuttings. It prefers even moisture and good humidity. It has no reserve of water for dry conditions, and will drop leaves immediately if allowed to dry out. We have sent seed to the Seed Fund, but people who have tried it have had difficulty with germination or trouble getting tiny seedlings established in pots.

The plant that we took to the Tampa convention is potted in straight long-fiber sphagnum moss, and is just under two years old from cuttings. The original plant is in a small mesh pot, moss-lined, in soilless mix. They both are growing, but the one in sphagnum is doing better. It is bigger than the original plant despite being much younger.

This article appeared originally in **The Gloxinian** Vol. 50, No. 4, Fourth Quarter 2000, Jeanne Katzenstein, editor. Members of The Gesneriad Society have access to many other interesting articles like this about gesneriads from past issues available in PDF form.

Gesneriad Society Webinar Information

Each webinar (live or anytime) will cost \$9.95 and may be ordered at <http://shop.gesneriadsociety.org/collections/webinars/products/webinar-growing-and-hybridizing-miniature-sinningias-live>

Information for live webinars

All live webinars will begin at 9 p.m. EST (or, 8 p.m. CST, 7 p.m. MST and 6 p.m. PST). Orders received within 24 hours of the event may not be able to be accommodated and the person will be advised as to options. The viewing link will be sent within 24 hours of the presentation time, and a reminder email will be sent one hour before the presentation. Please note that, while you can have as many people as you want in the room listening, you cannot share your link with others. At the live webinar you will be able to ask questions.

Information for anytime webinars

Anytime webinars will be available the day after the live webinar. The viewing link will be sent within 48 hours of placement of the order. Please note that while you can have as many

people as you want in the room listening, you cannot share your link with others. You will not be able to ask questions. The anytime webinar will be available for up to three months following the live webinar.

February 23, 2016

Growing and Showing Miniature Sinningias: Listen to a Pro from the Comfort of Your Home

Miniature sinningias are not nearly as difficult to grow as you might imagine. These delicate looking plants can be quite accommodating. Would you like to know how to grow them better? Are you not quite certain where to start? The "any time" viewing period will be February 24 - May 24. Dale Martens, 2014 winner of Best Streptocarpus and Best in Show at The Gesneriad Society's annual convention, discusses growing and showing miniature sinningias. Perhaps you've seen Dale Martens postings on several discussion groups or read her articles in *Gesneriads* journal. Now, you'll have the opportunity to listen to her discuss how she grows show-stopping specimens of this genus.



Dale's entries at a gesneriad convention.

March 1, 2016

Growing and Showing Primulinas: Listen to a Pro from the Comfort of Your Home

Primulinas, formerly known as chiritas, are a great plant for any gesneriad grower to have in his or her collection. If the foliage is interesting enough you don't have to worry if it isn't in bloom come show time. Would you like to know how to grow them better? Are you not quite certain where to start? The Gesneriad Society is now offering you a unique opportunity to listen to one of its own members share his considerable expertise on this subject. If you enjoy the *GLEANINGS* publication, you are in for a real treat. Its editor, Mel Grice is our expert this month. He participates in shows across the country. A generous man with both his time and his knowledge, he has agreed to share his considerable growing expertise with our webinar attendees. The "any time" viewing period will be March 2 - June 2, 2016.

Sinningias

Dale Martens dalemartens@mchsi.com
Sherrard, Illinois, USA

Growers often discover The Gesneriad Society after purchasing or receiving as a gift a "Florist Gloxinia." Research on the Internet soon leads them to our Society's informative website. The third quarter 2011 issue of *Gesneriads* is all about the Florist Gloxinia. Upon reading that journal one would discover that the Florist Gloxinia is actually *Sinningia speciosa*.

The genus *Sinningia* contains quite a variety of sizes and flower colors. A few species have scent. An excellent website to see photos and read in detail about various *Sinningia* species is Alan LaVergne's site "Sinningia & Friends:" <http://www.burwur.net/sinns/sinns.htm>. Ron Myhr, proprietor of The Gesneriad Reference Web, devotes a portion of his site to sinningias (<http://gesneriads.ca/gensinn.htm>).

Although a large book could be written about sinningias, this column will give highlights of basics for beginners. Let's start with light. Most of the smaller sinningias (under 12 inches

tall) appreciate a minimum of 10 to 12 hours of T-12 or T-8 fluorescent tube light. In my experience the larger the sinningia, the more light it needs to bloom and keep from being leggy. This means either increasing the time to 13 hours, or putting the plant under four T-12 or four T-8 tubes. There are some species and hybrids (for example *S. tubiflora* and *S. 'Apricot Bouquet'*) that grow well outdoors exposed in various degrees to the sun.

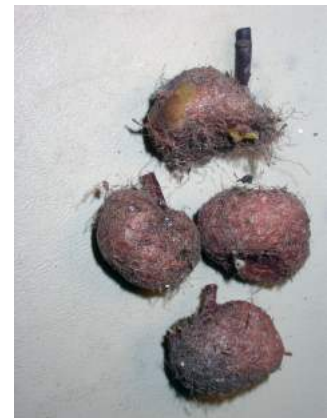
Most sinningias have a tuber for food storage. This allows the plant to go dormant if conditions such as cold or drought stress the plant. Some sinningias never go dormant and others go dormant annually even in the best of climate conditions. Dormancy usually lasts three to six months. There are options for caring for dormant tubers. Since the old soil has fertilizer salt build-up, I tend to remove the tuber from the old soil and wash it. Then I store the tuber in a zipped-closed, plastic baggie along with moist vermiculite or sphagnum. I write the date on the baggie and check it for new growth once a month. One can also leave the tuber in the old pot. When it sprouts again, one can either repot it in fresh soil or leach the old soil of fertilizer salts with a couple of cups of room temperature tap water. Just as potatoes have "eyes" where new growth sprouts, so do sinningias. At times there are multiple new growth areas. One can cut a tuber into sections as long as each section has an obvious growth area. Exposing the sections to air for twenty-four hours helps form a callus over the wound. If left out longer, the piece shrivels. To prevent rotting of the wound, one can press fine vermiculite next to the wound when potting the tuber sections.



Large tuber with 4 sprouting areas, cut into 4 sections.

Sinningias grow well in a soilless mix, and because most have a tuber, they would not appreciate soil that is constantly soaking wet. If wick watering is the method you use, consider having up to 1/2 of your mix be perlite. A balanced fertilizer is recommended. I give sinningias 1/8 teaspoon of balanced fertilizer per gallon of water.

When a mature sinningia begins to decline, there may be multiple tubers in the pot. These tubers are sometimes connected with a short stem and are easily separated with scissors. Other tubers are connected directly and will break apart if twisted in opposite directions. Sometimes the surface skin of the tuber gets torn. It will heal. In some cases a tuber forms on top of another tuber. You won't know until you separate them if the bottom tubers have growth sprout areas. Usually the top tuber already has some new growth right at the base of the old stem. If there is growth, go ahead and wash off the tuber and pot it right away. Take the bottom tubers and put them in a baggie with moist vermiculite or sphagnum and check on them monthly for new growth.



Multiple tubers, one photo showing a stack and the other with them separated

Some sinningia tubers are very attractive when exposed above the soil line. It's fun to watch people closely examine the exposed tubers during a show. *Sinningia defoliata* and *S. helioana* are similar in that their orange flowers can bloom from bare tubers. Karyn Cichocki and I collaborated to cross *S. pusilla* × *S. helioana* and created *S. 'Heartland's Flashlight'*. It has been known to bloom directly from the tuber without leaves.

The tiniest *Sinningia* species are *S. pusilla*, *S. concinna*, and *S. muscicola*. Over decades those species have been crossed with each other and with other sinningias to create new hybrids. Some classify those smallest ones as "micro-miniatures" and the next size larger as "miniatures." The advantage to smaller sinningias is that the tubers rarely go dormant. Instead, new shoots sprout when older shoots mature. There has been an explosion of exciting miniature hybrids created mostly in Taiwan and the United States. For example, you may be familiar with the miniature "Ozark" series by David Harris.

The scented sinningias may not be the easiest to grow. The scent is usually mild. Among the sinningias with scented flowers are *S. conspicua*, *S. guttata*, *S. lindleyi*, *S. speciosa* 'Pedra Lisa', *S. tubiflora*, *S. richii* 'Robson Lopes', and *S. villosa*. Some of the *Sinningia speciosa* hybrids have scent, so if you see a "Florist Gloxinia", sniff the flowers. Others have scented leaves, including the hybrid *S. 'Apricot Bouquet'* and the species *S. defoliata*.

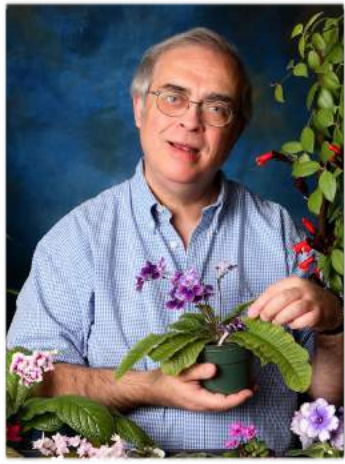


Sinningia guttata (one of the scented species)
grown by Bill Price

The Gesneriad Society's Seed Fund has an amazing assortment of sinningia seed. If you are a beginner, I'd like to suggest the following species: *Sinningia eumorpha*, *S. bullata*, *S. insularis*, *S. glazioviana*, *S. cardinalis*, and *S. pusilla*. The Seed Fund's key will tell you how large the plants grow and whether they have a dormancy period. The Seed Fund also has exciting sinningia hybrids. Keeping in mind the species just listed that have scent, there are seeds in the hybrids section of the Seed Fund with potential for producing scented flowers and/or leaves.

When the sinningia flower first opens, the female part (the pistil consisting of the ovary, style, and stigma) is quite short to prevent self-pollination. The style lengthens over the next few days. Many sinningias are easily pollinated if you wait until the flower has been open at least five days so the stigma is receptive to pollen. If you don't want the flower to self-pollinate, remove the male part (the anthers) as soon as the flower opens. The seedpods take between thirty and forty-five days to turn brown and split open. Sow the seeds on moist (not soaking wet) soilless mix in a small container with a lid. Avoid direct sun. Most sinningia seeds will sprout between three and forty-five days. Contact me for detailed instructions on caring for seedlings.

This article appeared originally in GESNERIADS Vol. 65, No. 3, Third Quarter 2015, Peter Shalit, editor. Read other interesting articles like this about gesneriads by becoming a member of The Gesneriad Society and receiving our quarterly 64-page journal.



From the editor —

I have been on a repotting frenzy for the last month. Many of my plants look better already. Or maybe it is that the days are getting longer and they sense the coming of warmer weather? Whatever the reason, it is so nice to be around green, blooming plants in the winter!

If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at melsgrice@earthlink.net

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WELCOME — membership in our international society includes quarterly issues of *Gesneriads* — *The Journal for Gesneriad Growers*, a copy of *How to Know and Grow Gesneriads*, a packet of gesneriad seeds and a wealth of information about our chapters, flower shows, publications, research, programs and seed fund. Membership begins upon receipt of dues.

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