

African Violet Design Tips

By Dorothy Raymond

Designs should “fill” niche without exceeding specified dimensions. Strive for ½ - 1” on both vertical and horizontal lines.

Theme

- Read the class description thoroughly – Is it a plant or blossom design and what may or may not be included in the design.
- Make a list of words, feelings, colors, textures that could be associated with the theme of the class to spark ideas for your design

Containers

- Container should be @ 1/3 of the width of the design as a general rule. They can be larger or smaller depending on the design and the weight of the plant/foilage material at the base.
- Match the container to the theme. (Ex. Don't use a porcelain bowl in a rustic design)
- If using a white container, use white line material. White has strong visual impact and unifying container and line material color can avoid distracting from the design.
- For plant designs, ensure container has enough capacity to hold an unpotted violet, the line material and foliage bases.
- Don't use a valuable container or one with sentimental value, sometimes bad things happen to good containers at the show.

Line Material

- Use line material to define space and set energy for design.
- Line material should also harmonize with the theme of the design.
- White Line Material – see comment in Containers above
- If too short to fill niche, can use florist picks or other methods to increase the height
- Sources include craft stores, the garden, and nature.

Mechanics

- Hide mechanics using foliage, mosses, fabric or whatever else fits in with the design.

Foliage

- Needs to harmonize with design
- Needs to cover mechanics
- Ideally will last 2 days without water; if it needs water, use Oasis (floral foam) or floral tubes to provide moisture keeping in mind that you must hid the mechanics from view.
- Use a foliage size appropriate to niche size
- Sources include florists, garden, nature, and your houseplants

Background Material

- Background fabric must be clean, and wrinkle free (unless that's part of the design esthetic)
- It must harmonize with the rest of the design
- Use straight or T-pins to fasten to foam board niches
- Optional – Cover stiff cardboard or light foam board cut slightly smaller than the niche back (Height x Width) and niche floor (Width x Depth) with material to create a panel that slides into niche. (Caution: niches may vary in size slightly from stated size in schedule, be prepared to adjust.

Plants

- The plant is the focal point of the design so it should have a sufficient amount of bloom and be healthy and disease/pest free. It may be purchased at any time before the show.
- Plants should be of suitable size for niche, i.e., a standard plant may be too big for a miniature design.

- Make sure plants are watered before using in the design.
 - Use a baggie or piece of plastic wrap to contain moist soil
 - Use material or old nylon footwear to disguise shine from the plastic wrap
 - Use other materials to assist in disguising mechanics such as moss, paper shreds or anything appropriate to the design theme.

Blossoms

- As with plant designs, the blossom should be the focal point of the design (exception: abstract designs)
- Blossoms in designs are more delicate and require conditioning to help them last as long as possible. Blossoms rarely last for more than a day though. Be prepared to replace them daily.
 - One method is to harvest the blossoms the night before and keep them in water overnight to ensure maximum hydration, this may make blossoms harder to transport.
 - Some designers put a dab of glue on the cut stem of the blossom to seal the stem.
 - Harvest blossoms from a well-watered plant daily at the show, my preferred method
- Choose blossoms with thicker stems and some length (1/2" to 3/4" ideally) for best success.
- Semi-double and double blossoms tend to last longer in designs.
 - This is especially true for blossoms used in underwater designs. Test your blossoms before the show, some blossoms bleed or turn translucent.
- A versatile method for creating floral tubes for blossom designs is using straws cut to length with one end made watertight by using hot glue. The resulting tubes can then be painted or wrapped in floral tape. They may then be glued or wired into place where needed in the design.

What you should have in your design box:

- Tools
 - Glue gun (low temperature) and glue sticks
 - Tweezers
 - Scissors
 - Utility knife
 - Tape measure
 - Needle nose pliers
 - Pruning shears
 - Eyedropper or syringe for adding water to tubes
 - Optional
 - Iron
 - Yard stick
 - Small hacksaw
- Materials
 - Floral tape
 - Floral clay
 - Masking tape
 - Straight pins
 - Pin frogs or needle holders
 - Straws or florist tubes
 - Plastic baggies and stocking/nylon material
 - A variety of wires
 - A pen and index cards