**February Flower of the Month: Iris and Violet**

Most people think of red—particularly red roses—when they imagine a Flower of the Month for February. And while we love those crimson beauties, we have a soft spot for purple. That’s why we chose two posies that truly wear that passionate hue with sassy style: the iris and the violet (the African violet, to be specific).

**Iris**

* **History of the Iris**

This delicate blossom has many meanings—all of which send a positive message to anyone who receives a bouquet of the stems: faith, hope, wisdom, courage and admiration. And while we admit to loving the purple blooms the best, the word *iris* comes from the Greek word for *rainbow* because the flower grows in a wide spectrum of colors. Among the colors that the floral industry has domesticated of this Flower of the Month, the standards are purple, blue, white and yellow.

In Greek mythology, the iris was the link between heaven and earth. As a result, ancient believers planted the flowers on the graves of women to summon the goddess Iris to guide the departed through their journey to the afterlife.

Egyptian kings also had high regard for the flower, depicting them in many places in their palaces—evidence of which still exists today.

Later, during the Middle Ages, the French monarchy adopted the flower, and its stylized image—the fleur-de-lis—as the country’s national symbol.

* **Care of Iris Bouquets**

The iris is one of the most graceful and elegant flowers that grows, but that beauty is short-lived compared to other blossoms. To ensure the longest vase life for your Flower of the Month, then, follow these care tips:

1. Remove the stems from the vase every two to three days (or when the water becomes discolored or cloudy—a sign of bacterial growth, which inhibits water uptake).
2. Set the stems aside, and dump the vase water. Wash the vase with warm, sudsy water and rinse thoroughly.
3. Refill the vase with fresh water and the appropriate amount of flower food from the packet that came with your flowers. (If your home tap water has a softener, use bottled water. Softened water will diminish the blooms’ vase life.)
4. Using a sharp knife or scissors, hold the stems underwater in a sink or under a running faucet and cut off about 1 inch from the bottom at an angle. Take care not to crush or bend the stem as you cut it. Damaging the stem will lessen its ability to take in water. As soon as you’ve cut the stem, place it into the vase of water. Don’t let the newly trimmed stem become dry.
5. Place your arrangement out of direct sunlight and away from drafts for the longest vase life.

**African Violet:**

If you’ve ever longed for a flower that never dies, our second Flower of the Month, the African violet, is your plant. Its violet-like flowers are particularly long-lasting; the plant will flower almost continuously, year-round, when given proper care. And if purple isn’t your passion, you can find cultivars in pink, white, lavender and fuchsia, too. Not only that, but you can find bi-colored blossoms, some with semi-double or double rows of petals, trailing cultivars and even miniature varieties.

The plants are especially popular because they can flourish in most homes, and their compact size allows nearly anyone to grow the plants, even someone limited to the space of only a windowsill.

**African Violet Care:**

* **Light.** Avoid direct sunlight, which can damage the plants. North- or east-facing windows are best. If natural light isn’t available, try fluorescent lighting, which many violet lovers discover can allow your Flower of the Month to truly flourish.
* **Temperature.** African violets grow well in air-conditioned spaces, but dislike extremes. So don’t allow them to chill when night-time temperatures drop or get too hot during summer months. If you have them in a window, and conditions will expose them to temperatures lower than 65 degrees Fahrenheit, place a piece of paper between the plants and the glass when the sun goes down.
* **Humidity.** Place pots on a container filled with pebbles, gravel, sand or perlite. Add water to allow evaporation to provide extra humidity to the plant. Don’t allow the pot itself to sit in water or the roots can rot.
* **Potting.** As your African violet grows, move it to a larger pot. African violets require loose, well-drained soil, so either buy potting mix especially made for this perky Flower of the Month or mix your own from equal amounts of soil, sphagnum peat moss and perlite.
* **Watering.** Over- or underwatering can damage your plant. The main goal is to keep soil continuously moist, but not soaked. When you water, keep the crown of the plant dry and don’t allow cold water to pour over the leaves. Room temperature water is best. Wait until the top inch of soil is dry before watering again. Then water until you see liquid seeping from the pot’s drainage hole.