



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

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

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This issue includes photos of gesneriads blooming now and Jay Sespico's article on new light stand construction based on plant culture.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings!**

Mel Grice, Editor

Terri Vicenzi from Indiana, USA, sent these photos (top and right) of *Streptocarpus* 'UA-Retro', a hybrid created by Julia Sklyarova.

Terri Vicenzi photos



Gesneriads Blooming Now

Terri Vicenzi photos



Streptocarpus 'Motyl'

Streptocarpus 'Bristol's
Cherry Bomb'





Primulina flavimaculata
Leve Hajdu photo



Kohleria 'Bud's Little Pig'
Ron Myhr photo

New Light Stand Construction Based On Plant Culture

Jay Sespico

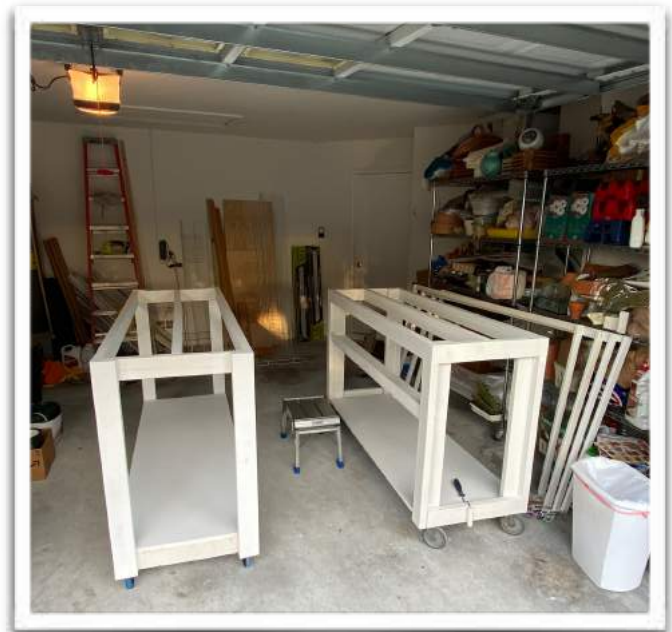
Have you ever received a gift that you couldn't refuse, but it just seemed to come at the wrong time? Well, that's what happened to me when my friends Nancy and Jerry Kast gifted me with a set of new light stands. It seemed like a gift from heaven because the shelves were free and they even offered to help with the transportation. Eventually we loaded one stand in each of our vehicles, and began the long trip from their home in San Antonio, Florida to my home in Valrico, which is a long way south even as the crow flies.

The timing seemed to be right for the givers, as Nancy and Jerry were divesting themselves of a lot of plants and downsizing their huge collection. But I couldn't help feeling that I was taking on a big project just at the time that I had so many other big projects planned for myself.

The shelves were cleverly designed in a pragmatic way by Jerry, but they definitely needed some work before I could proudly display them in my living room. They looked unfinished, as they were originally designed simply to grow plants on Nancy's back porch and were not meant to be used as a vehicle for display, which is how they would eventually be used at my house. One of the things that I really loved about them is that they had large casters that would make the stands easily moveable, even when the extra weight of the large plants and their equally large water reservoirs would be loaded onto them.

A second feature I really liked was that the new stands were six feet long and similar enough to each other that they could adequately fill the same display space that the three older and dissimilar stands currently occupied. This would not only provide a more unified look to my living space, but make the plants that would eventually grow on them display better as well.

Once the units were delivered safely into my garage, it took me about a week to decide how I would eventually rebuild them. Some of the considerations would revolve around

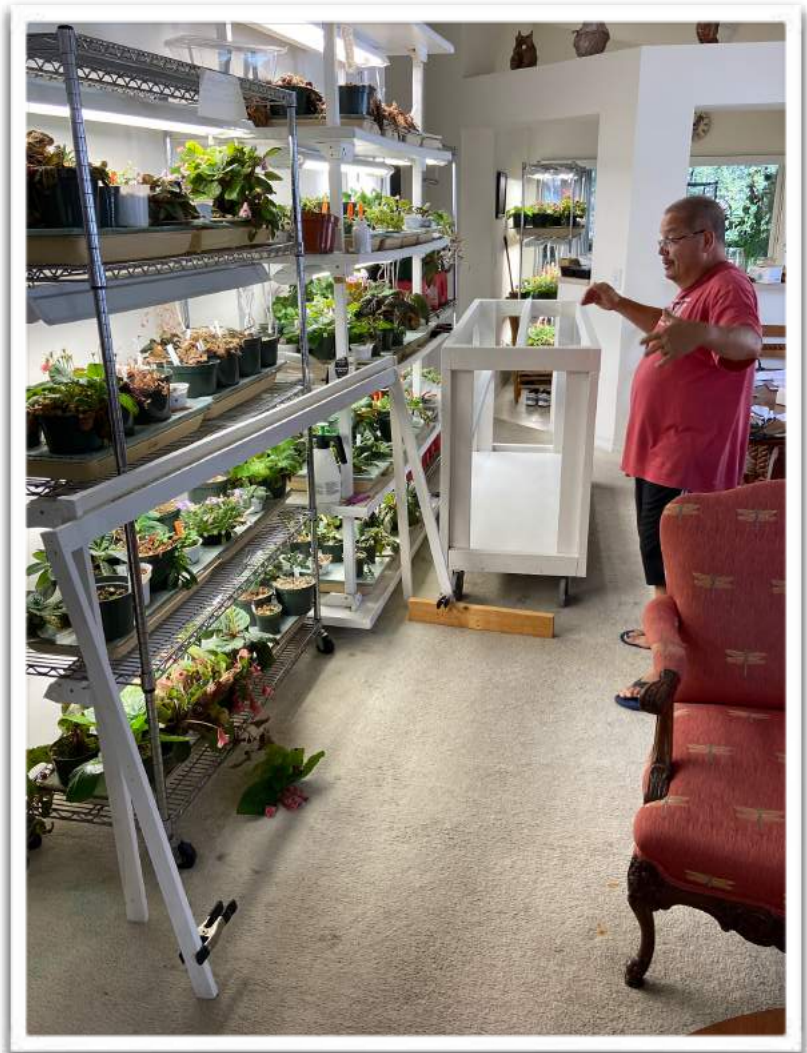


Construction almost finished and the painting begun.

how to take the best advantage of what was so graciously plopped into my lap, while improving some of the overall design concepts as well.

Every design concept I could think of seemed to be in play at once. My head was swimming with all kinds of ideas about form, functionality, line, and spacing. But I was getting nowhere, because each consideration was based on the next, and I was having trouble settling on any final conclusions. When it suddenly occurred to me that all the design considerations should revolve around the types of plants I would eventually be growing on these shelves, I was able to make some headway. One of the first things I needed to do was to unlearn some old concepts that had worked well in the past but were no longer valid in building the new generation of shelving.

One of those old ideas that I had to give up immediately was that the shelves didn't need to be so close together in height. The old stands I owned had been built primarily for growing plants that had the basal rosette shape. So they worked just fine for growing African violets and primulinas. The spacing between those shelves was seventeen inches from the base of the shelf to the top of the light fixtures, but this sometimes caused problems. Even with such low-growing plants, it was sometimes hard to avoid the all too inevitable collision between the flower stalks and the light tubes. So the new stands would have to be much farther apart, as they were going to accommodate upright growing plants that often have long inflorescences to consider. The old-style stands held relatively small plants in six inch pan pots at the very largest. In contrast, the new stands would grow plants that prefer to grow in roomier containers that would be eight, ten, and twelve inches in diameter such as kohlerias, gesnerias, and sinningias.



My friend Rafael asks me how I'm going to move all the plants from the three plant stands and squeeze them onto the two new ones.



Painting is done and final assembly begins.



The second level shelving is open wire racks.



The shelves were two different heights when I received them. Now, they match almost perfectly.

Jay Sespico photos

How to supply an adequate amount of light for such high-intensity, light-loving plants was the second most important consideration. This problem had the other complication that the distance between the lights and the top of the plants was greater than the distances of the previous shelving. The distance between the bottom of a shelf to the light fixtures above averages thirty-four inches on the new light stands. Plus the shelving only provided for two levels of plants at this distance. On previous shelves I had suspended the lighting from the bottom of the shelf above, but only having two levels of plants due to the greater amount of height left me with the problem of how to hang the lights over the top of the second level of plants. Jerry had come up with a very unique idea of supporting the lights on one-by-two beams that ran the length of the shelving. This meant having to pull out a few woodworking tricks to make a platform sturdy enough to hang lighting fixtures above the plants. Once I found the solution to this problem, I was pleased with the result because it made the stands look lighter and airier than they already did.

The decision about what kind of lighting to use was an easy one to make. I have used LED lighting for many years now, due to their high efficiency output and their low cost of energy use. A longer distance between the lighting fixtures on the top of the plants makes the LED lighting a better choice because they don't have as much light fall off with distance compared to fluorescent tubes. I ended up using my favorite shop light fixture, available at Costco from the Feit company. These units can supply 4000 lumens of cool-white light at 4000K of spectrum with no noticeable heat discharging from the fixture. They are very light in



The lights are suspended over the top of the second shelving and functioning on all levels.



The old plant stands are out of the way and the big project of moving the plants begins.



Finally the great move is finished and the plants look like they're enjoying their new home.

Jay Sespico photos

weight and emit a surprisingly smooth glow with no trace of the individual diodes. It has been my experience that the plants bloom well under these kinds of lights, and I personally find them pleasant to be around.

How to supply adequate hydration for large specimen plants was a problem that I have been working on for a long time. I discovered that I really enjoyed growing large sized plants, and the larger the plants would grow the more water they needed to stay in good shape. I know it may seem obvious to most people that larger plants will need more water than smaller ones, but the more my collection grew and the greater number of specimen plants that I was acquiring made an added complication to the watering issues. A specimen plant in a ten or twelve-inch pot guzzles water as fast as an overpowered car guzzles gas. There were scheduling concerns due to the frequency of refilling the water supply to each individual plant and how to wick them as well. I settled on the idea of recycling the Folgers coffee cans we had available at work. I would commandeer the empty cans as they made great reservoirs. The lids were waterproof and it was easy to make a hole in them with a soldering iron. The red color of the cans also keeps the algae at bay and simply needs a quick rinse with liquid bathroom cleaner between waterings. The wicks need to be long due to the deep nature of the container and I find two four-ply lengths of acrylic yarn will do the trick of drawing up the water into the root ball. The wicks will drain the cans completely dry in as little as two weeks here in Florida.



Once these decisions were made it seemed that in no time at all the shelves were complete and ready to install in the living room. Moving the plants to the new shelves took the longest of any of the other processes. I think the new light shelves turned out quite nicely thanks to Nancy and Jerry and a little elbow grease on my part. But I thought it might be interesting to discuss considerations that went into building the shelves just in case there are any readers out there who might be considering a better home for their old plant friends.

I thought the shelves could use some accessories. Although they are unpainted at this point, they work well at both ends of the shelving wall.



Large specimen plants like *Gesneria pedunculosa* need a constant supply of water.



Jay Sespico photos



From the editor —
 Hope that winter is being kind to you. Please send photos of your blooming plants!

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

Mel

Consultants Alcie Maxwell
 Judy Zinni
 Vicki Ferguson
 Dale Martens

Internet Communications Julie Mavity-Hudson
 Paul Susi

Newsletter Editor Mel Grice
 2019 Crosswind Ct.
 Englewood, OH
 45322 USA
melsgrice@gmail.com

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Austin Grevious
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The Gesneriad Society Membership Secretary, Bob Clark,
 1122 East Pike Street, PMB 637, Seattle, WA 98122-3916 USA

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