

WHAT'S EATING MY PLANTS?

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First of all let me say that in the almost 30 years of growing, I thought I had pretty much experienced it all. I've had my bouts with thrips, mites and mealy bugs, and a couple of experiments with soil and watering methods that went all wrong, among other things. If it hadn't happened to me, I had heard about it from my violet growing friends.

I was so happy that I was right on schedule for the Ohio State Show and had all of my violets repotted and my new babies potted up. My stands were cleaned off with new plastic on the shelves. I had the violets and seedlings in trays and draped plastic over my stands to help with the humidity. I had not gotten to my gesneriads yet, and had a couple of streps that were blooming nicely, so I thought I would just let them bloom until I got back down to finish repotting.

It was several days later when I made my way back down to the basement to check on them and I was shocked to see that the blooms on the streps were gone. Not just done blooming and fallen off, but completely gone. My first thought was one of the cats had gotten in the basement and chewed them off. We don't usually let them downstairs, because even though they do not usually bother the plants, they do like to jump up on the shelves and knock things over.



No bug that I have ever heard of could completely eat the blooms with nothing left. Upon closer examination, I found what looked like little black grains of rice on my clean stands. Mice? Do mice really eat blossoms?

I got on my computer and did a little research and found out that mice pretty much eat anything, but how could we have mice when we have 5 cats? Granted they do not go in the basement much, but we have 2 outside cats who should have been doing a better job of "patrolling the grounds." Anyway, I thought, OK, I'll let the cats downstairs overnight and see what happens.

The next morning, there was a dead mouse by the basement door. "Good Kitty." Problem solved—or so I thought.



Since my job as assistant to the general manager and program director of a 64-lane bowling and entertainment center requires me to fill in when someone is on vacation, or a manager gets fired, it was almost a week later when I was able to check on my plants again. I was completely devastated and in tears. There were plants that were knocked over in the trays. Seedlings were pulled out of their pots, leaves were chewed off and the centers of several plants were completely gone. It was unbelievable the amount of damage that was done to my violets.

This means war. Even though I really do not like to kill any living creature (I even relocate spiders that get inside) I had to do something. I went up to the Family Dollar Store which is the closest store to where we live and bought 3 mouse traps. I put a little peanut butter on each one and set them up on my plant stands. The next morning I had 3 dead mice. I carefully removed them to the outside and reset the traps. Thankfully there has not been any more plant damage and no more mice in the traps. I will still keep them set and they will become part of



my growing area just like my yellow sticky traps.

I still cannot figure out how they managed to get in past the outdoor cats or where they could possibly have found their way inside. We have never had a “mouse problem” before and we have been here 15 years. We had an exterminator check the outside of the house and he cannot find where they could have gotten in. Hopefully it never happens again—but in just in case my traps will be set.

The good news is African violets are resilient and I’m sure the centers will be growing back and the damaged leaves will grow out. Unfortunately it will not be in time for the Ohio state show. Just another one of the trials and tribulations of an African violet grower.