

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## VIOLA

The twenty or so summer-dormant *Viola* spp. of the American West have never become well-known in cultivation. While they may present some difficulties in cultivation, we suspect that the very considerable difficulty in collecting seed from them is the main reason. There has just been too little material with which to experiment. When we were involved with growing alpine-house plants we grew several quite successfully, mainly from collections made by that dedicated team of the 1970's, Jim McPhail & Bob Woodward. We outline a few pointers under *Viola beckwithii*, which we grew well: The main point to remember is that while the fleshy roots can survive drought in nature, in cultivation a well-drained mixture can result in overdrying. We had no problems with clay pots plunged in damp sand. There tends to be more underground than on top with these and a deep pot is best. We always potted very low and topped up with grit, building this up to a depth of at least 8cm (3 in) over a few years. Once established in a large pot, we found those we grew very little trouble. One other comment from personal experience is to note that several species produce only cotyledons in the year of germination: an uncommon but widespread stratagem of some dry-climate species (e.g. *Helleborus vesicarius*). So, do not think seedlings have died if they go dormant without producing true leaves. Keep the seedlings growing as long as possible & do not dry too much. We cannot remember which species did this, so, if they do not and grow ahead so much the better; keep it in mind, however, to avoid a terrible tragedy!