Hybridizing Gesneriads

A Brief Introduction

Why Hybridize Gesneriads?

- Offspring will be different than their parents
  - Unlike vegetative propagation by leaf, tuber, or rhizome, seed offspring are not clones
  - You can develop plants that like your growing conditions better than their parents do, while still looking like the parents
  - You can combine the leaves you love from plant 1 with the flowers from plant 2
  - You can just cross for the fun of seeing how many different types of bloom or leaf or growth habit can come from a simple cross

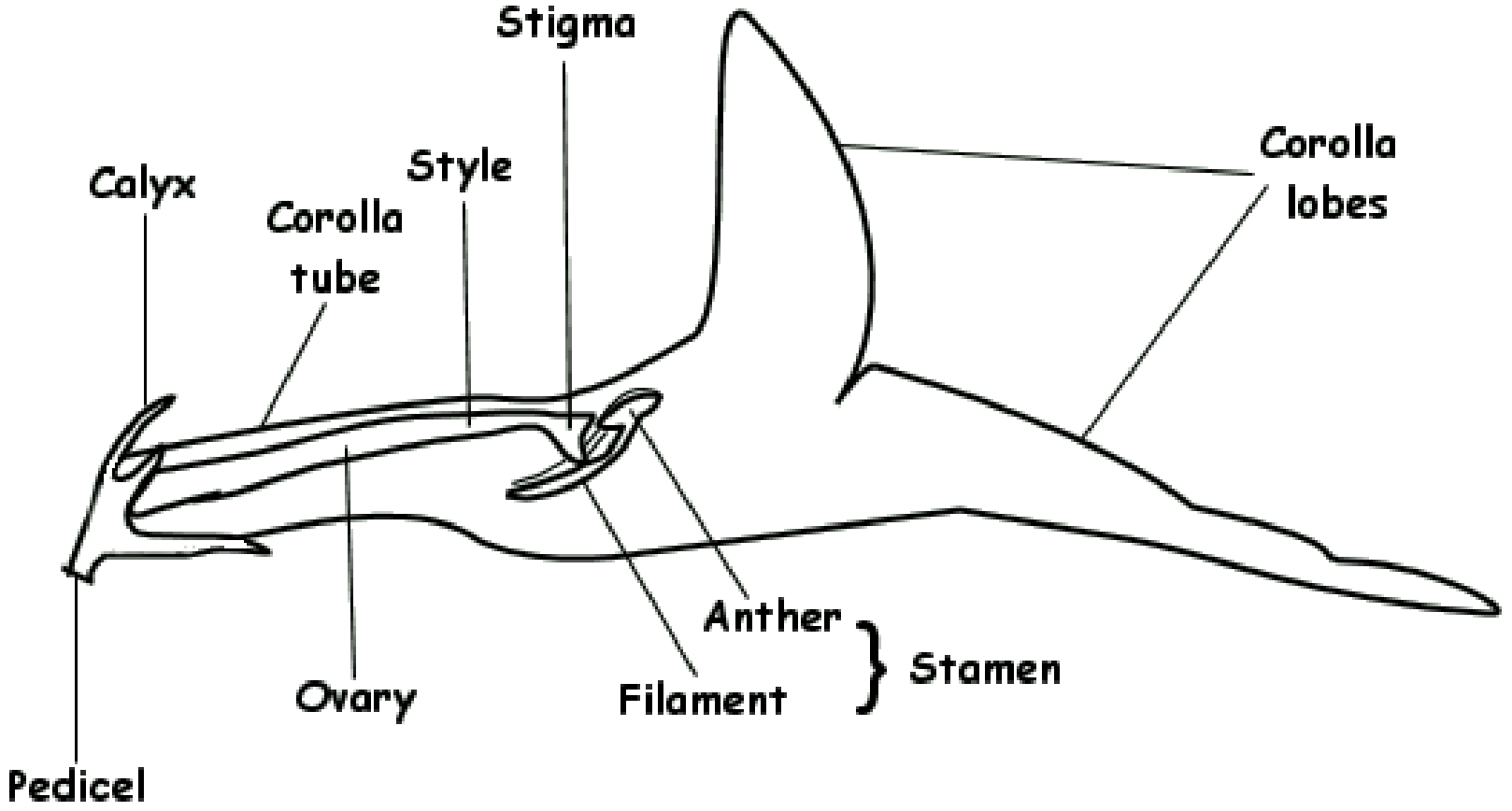
Why Hybridize Gesneriads?

- Gesneriads are easy to cross with themselves, with other varieties, with other species, even with other genera
- (Many kinds of) Gesneriad seed pods contain huge numbers of seeds, so you get to see a lot of variety from one cross
- Seed of some genera can take as little as two months to mature and ten days to germinate, and six months or less to grow to blooming size
- Seeds are easy to start in home conditions – all they need is a plastic tub, some potting medium, and a side table or windowsill

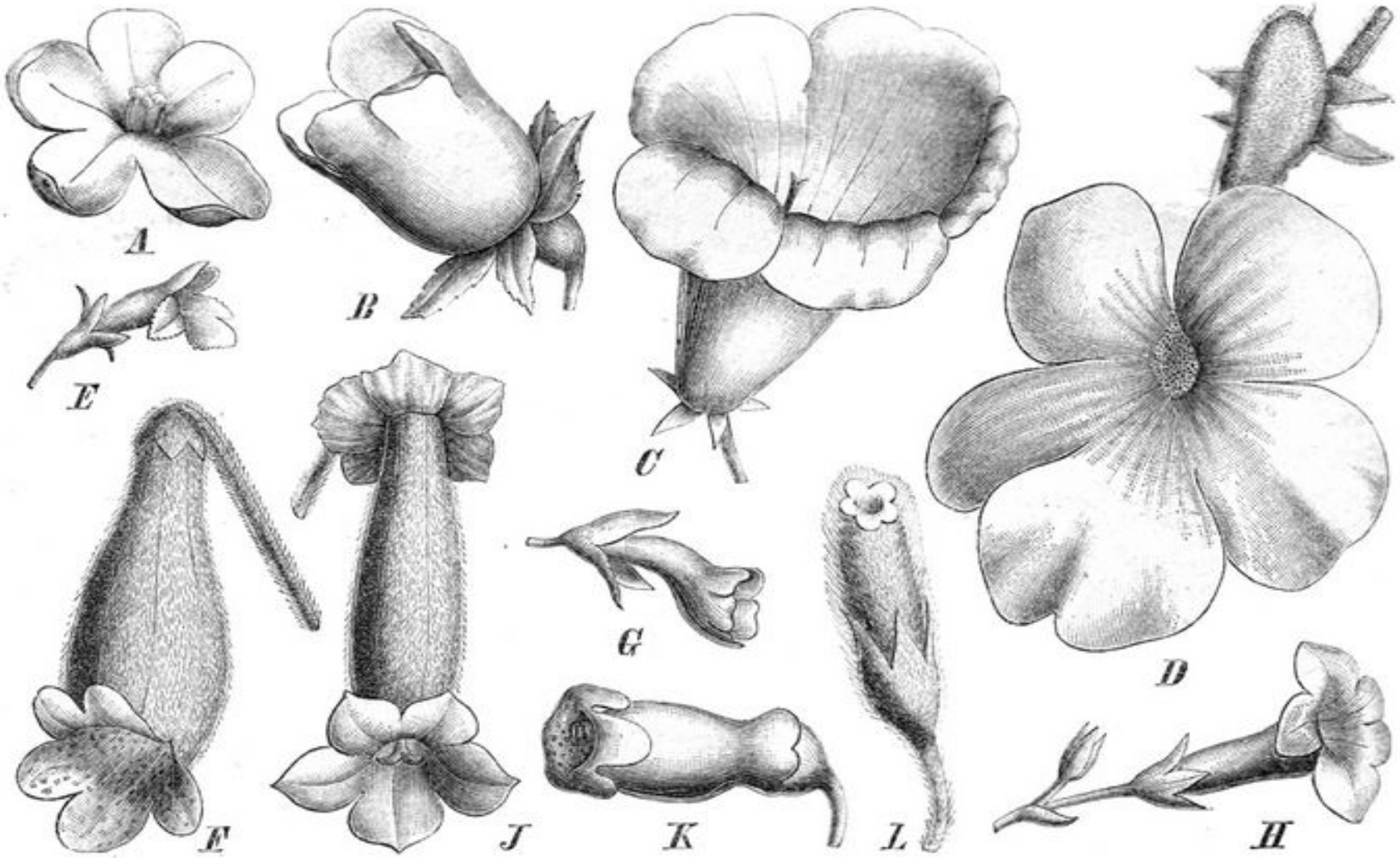
GHA Resources

- The Gesneriad Society has a special interest group (the Gesneriad Hyridizers Association) that you can join for much information and discussion
- Membership includes a three-times-a-year newsletter with techniques and reports from other gesneriad hybridizers, plus access to the GHA seed fund (separate from the Gesneriad Society's seed fund)

Parts of a Gesneriad Flower



Gesneriad Flower Shapes



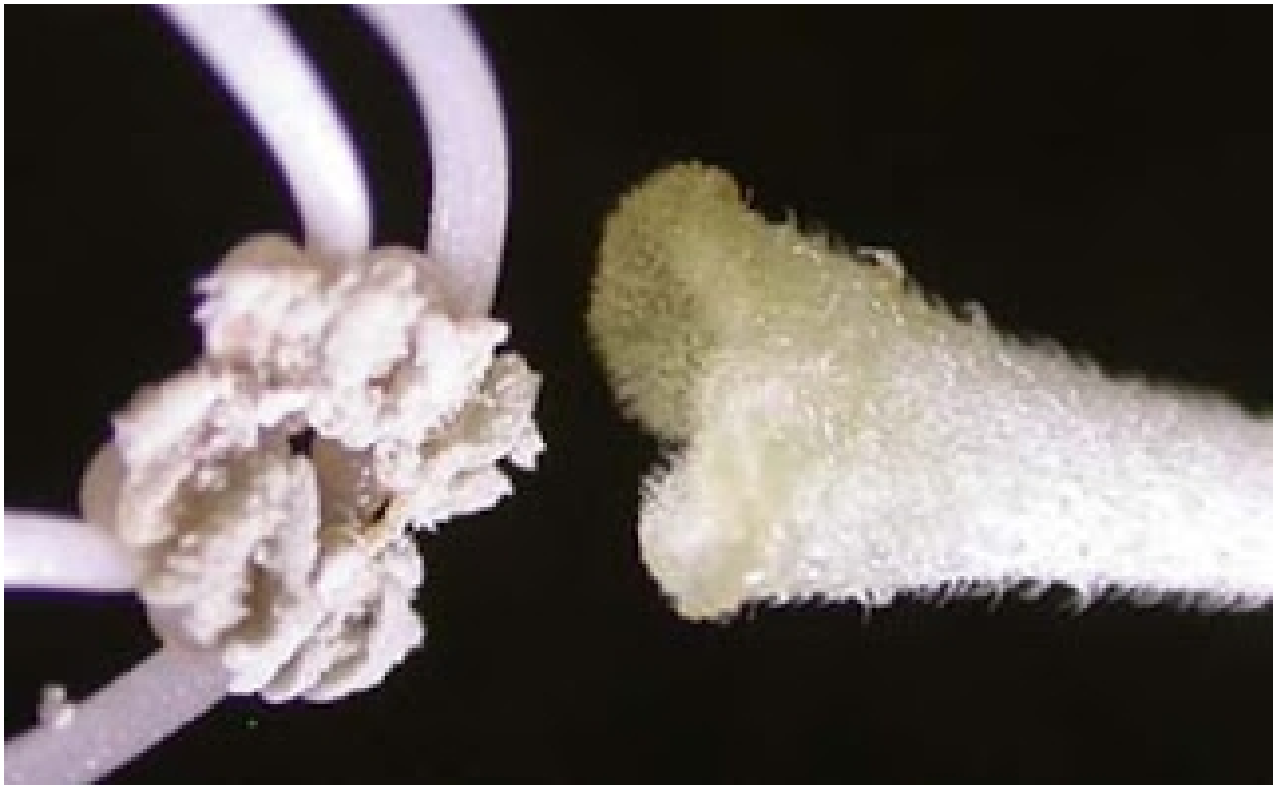
Sinnigia Blooms of Different Ages

Pollination

- Step one is getting blooms – this will be different for each kind of gesneriad
- Step two is getting pollen from stamens onto stigma
- “Selfing” (using pollen from the same plant that you want the seed pod on) is the easiest
- For the tubular bloomers, this is easiest of all: put a toothpick in the tube when the anthers are the right length, and rattle things around
  - Streps sometimes self just from being picked up and moved around
  - Deinostigma tamiana tends to self without any help at all

Pollination

- For most of the gesneriads, though, you will have to help them:



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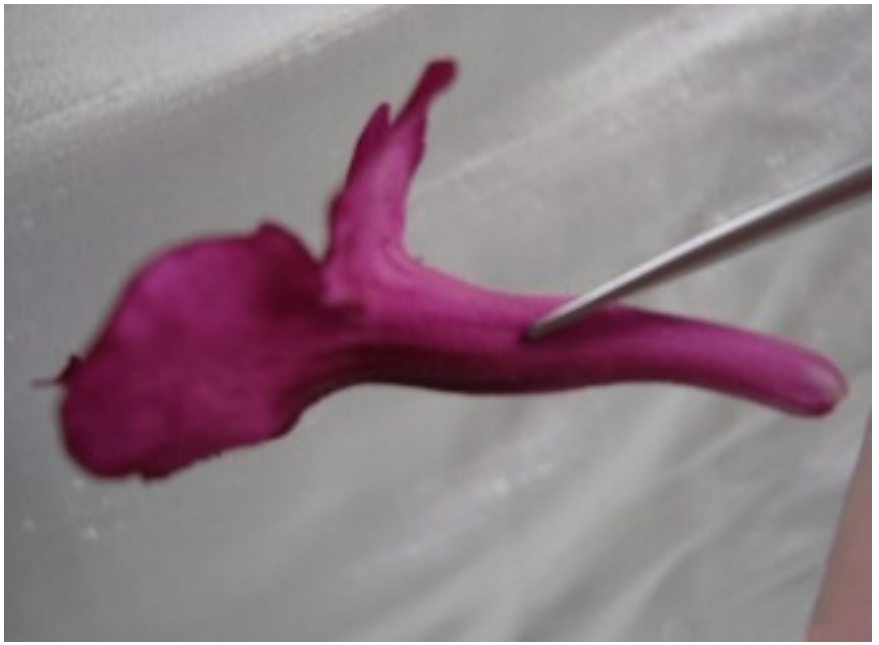

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Seed Pod Development

- Once you have gotten pollen onto the stigma, it's a waiting game until you can tell if the pollination worked.
  - Episcias need very high humidity
  - Petrocosmeas need cooler, dryer conditions to bloom
  - African Violets need humidity to set seed, although not as much as episcias
  - Primulinas have a very narrow window of time within the bloom cycle when they are willing to set seed

Seed Pod Development

- In most species cases (African violet “sticktight” hybrids are an exception, and there may be others), the blossom will come loose between three days and a week after a successful pollination
- In all cases, a fresh, live bloomstalk (even if the flower is gone) is a good indication that the plant is supporting a seed pod, even if you can't see the pod yet

Seed Pod Development

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Ripe Seed Pods

Ripe Seed Pods

And Then We Plant

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