Of weeds and popular plants.....

Petty spurge (*Euphorbia peplus)*

Family: Spurge family (*Euphorbiaceae*)

Other names: Round-leaved spurge, milkweed

Habitat: Gardens, **ruderal** sites, more rarely in fields and vineyards.

Occurrence: From the plains to medium mountainous areas; in the Alps up to about 800 metres above sea level.

Height of growth: 5 to 30 centimetres

Stem: Branched from the base, leafless, light green, sometimes with a reddish tinge

Cotyledons: egg-shaped-oval, about eight millimetres long

Stem leaves: Roundish to **obovate**, stalked, with entire margins, bare, 10 to 20 millimetres long and 5 to 10 millimetres wide, the lower ones much smaller.

Flowering time: June to October

Bloom: Yellow-green. The terminal umbel is usually three-rayed. The bracts are triangular to ovate, usually tapering to a point. The nectar glands have long, hair-like horns.

Fruits/seeds: The fruit capsule has six-winged longitudinal ridges. It is smooth and about 2.5 millimetres in size. The seed is almost hexagonal, ovoid, 1.5 x 1 millimetre.

Life span: annual

Importance
*in agriculture***:** very low competition; rather rare in fields.
in horticulture: occurs in vineyards, but rather rarely
in home and allotment gardens: more important as a weed in gardens

Indicator value for
temperature: moderate warmth to warmth showing
humidity: on dry to moderately moist soils
Nitrogen: more common on nitrogen-rich soils

Dr. G. Bedlan

Literature
Bedlan, G.: Wild Vegetables. Publishing house Jugend & Volk Vienna, 1997.
Bedlan, G.: Unkräuter - Bedeutung in Gartenbau und Landwirtschaft. Öst. Agrarverlag, 9th edition, 2010.
Ellenberg, H.; Weber, H. E.; Düll, R.; Wirth, V.; Werner, W.; Paulißen, D.: Zeigerwerte von Pflanzen in Mitteleuropa. Erich Goltze KG Göttingen, 2nd A., 1992.
Hanf, M.: Ackerunkräuter Europas mit ihren Keimlingen und Samen. Verlags Union Agrar, 4th A., 1999.

Usambara violet (*Sainpaulia*)

For many years now, the usambara violet has been one of the most popular plants decorating our living rooms. They are available all year round in numerous varieties with single, double, wavy or curled blossoms in white, pink, red, purple, blue, bicoloured and also as minis.

Their **story** is very romantic: late in the afternoon of a summer day in 1892, the German governor in German East Africa went for a walk with his bride in his rubber tree and vanilla plantation. They sought shelter from the heat of the day in the shady woods along a river. When the two suddenly came across a flower hitherto completely unknown to them, the groom was so excited that he plucked a bouquet of these "African violets" for his fiancée. This man's name was Baron Adalbert Emil Walter Redcliffe Le Tanneux of Saint Paul. He was born on 12 January 1860.
On 12 December 1940, the discoverer of the Usambara violet died in Berlin. And yet the baron of Saint Paul was by no means as great a flower lover as his father Ulrich, who had his estate in Fischbach, a Silesian village. But his castle park was also adorned with the rarest outdoor plants that he had brought back from his many travels. So, Adalbert did not hesitate for a moment when he discovered the plants in Africa, which were completely new to him, to send his father Ulrich some seeds, possibly also plants. When the gardener in Germany had grown up the first plants and brought them to blossom, he was thrilled by this treasure he had received from Africa. He did not hesitate for long either and sent some of the specimen to his friend Hermann Wendland, then director of the botanical garden in Hanover-Herrenhausen. This man gave the plants the new generic name *Saintpaulia* in honour of the family from which he had received them. The species name *ionantha*, on the other hand, is Greek and means "violet-like". It was described by Wendland in an issue of the journal "Gartenflora" in 1893.

Family: *Saintpaulia* belong to the *Gesneriaceae*, as do *Streptocarpus* (twisted fruit), *Columnea* (columnee), *Sinninga* (gloxinie) or *Achimenes* (slate).

Its **habitat** is the Usambara Mountains of East Africa/Tanzania.

The **blossoming time** depends on the age of the plants, but they usually flower all year round only interrupted by a resting period of several weeks.

Their **location** should be chosen light to semi-shady, but without direct sun.

The **temperature requirements** are 20°C and above in summer and not below 18°C in winter. Caution is then called for when airing, as temperatures of just 2 to 3°C can cause severe damage to these very cold-sensitive plants. The watering water should always be well tempered and soft, as too cold or very chalky water will cause light ring-shaped spots on the leaves. Furthermore, the leaves should not be wetted when watering. Stagnant moisture suffocates the roots and they start to rot, the leaves become limp, discolour and become soft

rotten, so excess water should always be poured off. From spring to the beginning of autumn the plants should be lightly fertilised, but higher salt concentrations in the substrate should be avoided. Withered leaves should be removed regularly. Propagation is very simple by leaf cuttings and is easy even for beginners if the soil is warm enough (approx. 20°C).

Diseases and pests occur mainly in dry air (aphids, mealy bugs) or when humidity is too high and soil temperatures are low (*thrips*, grey mould, Phytophthora, Pythium, Rhizoctonia). Sometimes powdery mildew can cause damage to the blossoms.

Summary:

- Relatively easy to care for
- Decorative
- Protect from full sun
- Do not use cold water
- Easy to propagate via leaf cuttings