

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



April 2007

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, April 19, 2007** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

April Program

Growing Bromeliads: The Basics

This month we will have a group discussion led by **Dan Arcos** on the basics of bromeliads. We should all bring lots of show and tell plants and be prepared to contribute to the discussion. Dan will also have a slide show on the bromeliads we can grow in the Bay area.

There will be a large plant table and plants for sale – some that were in our display at the Cow Palace and some from members who have a surplus and want their bromeliads to find a new home.

April Refreshments

Lupe Cota and **Tom Vincze** will provide refreshments this month.

2007 Dues are overdue

Our annual dues are now due: \$15 (single) and \$20 (dual). Please pay at the meeting or by mail to **Harold Charns** (address on last page of newsletter).



This is a **Tom Vincze** photo of our society display at the recent flower and garden show at the Cow Palace.

March Meeting

Although our scheduled speaker was Paul Isley from Rainforest Flora nursery in southern California, he was sick and his partner **Jerry Robinson** stood in for him. Jerry represents the business end of the nursery and he gave us a history of their nursery and how it is evolving. Since their nursery can not survive on the plants desired by a bromeliad collector, they have found a niche in mounted tillandsias found in places such as Home Depot. But to be successful, you must advance from selling tillandsias mounted on grape wood. Jerry traveled to China and now has several contracts for ceramic figurines on which to mount the plants ranging from pumpkins to toucans to Indian chiefs. The quality of these figurines is so good that the public will buy these and get the tillandsias as a bonus. Jerry's story was fascinating and he kept us spellbound as he pulled another object from his box of figurines. He also brought a variety of plants for sale, many of our members also went for the figurines that Jerry brought.



Aechmea recurvata was one of the spectacular plants in our display at the Cow Palace. This photo is by Moyna Prince and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

BSSF wins Gold Medal at San Francisco Garden Show 2007

The Bromeliad Society of San Francisco has a display on the main floor of the Home and Garden Show at the Cow Palace from Wednesday, March 21 through Sunday, March 25. Two of our landscaping professionals are putting BSSF on the main floor this year! David Feix has designed and Casper Curto of Casper Landscaping is putting together a likely award-winning display. (Dan Arcos and Tom Vince have put in many, many hours and the society has donated many beautiful plants too). **Please respond immediately to our President if you wish to attend the Tuesday Night Discount Gala.** Tickets are available for Tuesday evening, March 20 (\$85 off \$185 admission). Come see the BSSF entry win a big trophy!

The Bromeliad Society of San Francisco was awarded a Gold Medal March 20, 2007 at the San Francisco 2007 Garden Show held annually at the Cow Palace. The medal was awarded for Garden Creator and was one of 3 gold medals in that category.

The judges were Fergus Garret from Great Dixter House and gardens in East Sussex, UK, Landscape Architect Steve Martino, FASLA from the US and Mario Schjetman, founder of Grupo de Diseno Urbano, Mexico City and Professor at the School of Landscape Architecture at the University of Tucson. We were praised for our design and bold use of bromeliads. The title of the display was "Proven Bromeliads for the Bay Area".

The garden was designed by **Dan Arcos, Casper Curto, Daryl Durcharme, David Feix and Tom Vinze**. Casper's crew from his company, Casper Landscape, was indispensable in the building of the garden. Our Thanks to them!

The BSSF would also like to thank all its members that participated in providing plants to create the garden and volunteering to greet and inform the countless people at the SF Garden Show. 2007 saw a marked increase in attendance at the SF Garden Show.

Binders for BSI Journals

If anyone is interested in purchasing binders for their BSI journal, your editor will be glad to pick them up directly from the publication chairman and we can save on the shipping costs.

The New BSI binders are black with gold printing and logos (new image soon). Each binder holds 12 issues (2 years worth) of the BSI Journal. They measure 10" x 6.75" x 2.50". They are now being sold in sets of 5 or 10. They are priced as follows:

- \$40 (5 binder set)
- \$77.50 (10 binder set).

Your editor will be going to San Diego on 27 April and must know before then if you want me to pick up binders for you.

A Letter to the Editor

This letter is reprinted from The Bromeliad Society Bulletin Vol. V No. 5. It was written in 1955; however, it could have been written today!

I do thank you for correcting my mistakes in the denomination of some of the species. I must tell you, however, that I have done and am doing everything to understand the bromeliad's classification but I must confess that I am almost at a complete loss. For example, take the Nidulariums. I have learned to know them in the Botanical Garden of Berlin and eventually learned to recognize them easily. Recently, however, the same plants I knew as Nidulariums were classified as Aregelias, Neoregelias, and now Canistrums! It seems that because of the big push the bromeliads took in the last years, they were studied more accurately and by more specialists so that the family was enlarged enormously, splitting in more and more forms. Exactly the same thing happened with the Cacti family where classification was brought to a nearly chaotic situation.

Literature is not sufficient, nor clear, or is poor. I have several books and among them is your Handbook. I think that this handbook, which should help the non-specialist, does not show clearly enough the differences between the various genera, so that one could tell them apart by careful observation. Very often infinitesimal details of the flower structure are emphasized as important marks of a certain genus. Unfortunately, not everybody has a microscope and the plants are not permanently flowering. I think there ought to be other differences, such as the form and texture of the leaves, etc. which would enable the non-specialist to classify, reasonably, what he is seeing.

I would like to suggest to you that such a clear and understandable study of these differences be worked out and publicized in one of the Bulletins. I think many an enthusiast will profit from it and give it a warm

approval. I think this must be done; otherwise it may happen that true hobbyists get discouraged to keep on with an orderly nomenclature. By the way, I do really wonder on what characteristics the Aechmeas are recognized. I have already seen Aechmeas so different from one another that I almost could not believe it (with bracts and without bracts).

I am glad to tell you that my ad brought a good number of orders. Many customers have asked for more and more of the species but, because of the impossibility of a correct classification, I could not offer more than a small group, of which names I feel quite sure. It is no fun to send seeds of "X" and hear later that it is "Y".

Richard Doering – Brazil

Why I Grow Tillandsias

This article by Jerry Krulik is reprinted from the November 2003 Pup Talk, newsletter of the Saddleback Valley Bromeliad Society.

I grow these plants because I am bankrupt!

That's right, bankrupt! Bankruptcy is the state of having insufficient resources, so that is, horticulturally, my state of being.

I don't have any more pot space. I am using shelves and shelves over shelves, and shelf holders, and pots on the cement, and hanging pots, and leaning pots, and sagging pots, and overgrown pots. I can't put any more pots anywhere, especially on the ground.

Have I mentioned the ground in my yard? Every inch does at least double duty, often triple or quadruple duty. Hard to do? Yes, but not impossible. I have "regular" plants all over – cactus, succulents, cycads, orchids, trees, even a few ground covers. I also like bulbs, and bulbs like me. So I grow a lot of different kinds. What I like about bulbs is that they mostly disappear for much of the year, because they sleep underground. Some sleep for 6 to 9 months. So I can plant a patch of ground with spring bulbs, summer bulbs, and fall/winter bulbs, if I plant well enough or am just plain lucky – some would say lazy. They just thread their way around all the other obstacles – I mean plants – in their way in order to grow.

This brings me back to Tillandsias. They are a bankrupt person's dream. They don't need pots. They don't need soil. They are happy with leftover water, an occasional spray or mist or rain storm. If a bird does his duty on them, they thrive. And they flower profusely and multiply vigorously. Best of all, they

don't need pots. They don't need fancy soil mixes or any kind of soil. They don't like growing on the ground. All I need is my leftover ball of twine that I had been saving for just this opportunity.

So now I can use all that formerly wasted space – things like tree trunks or branches. Fence posts. Fences. Dead logs. Patio covers. (I found a jungle of Tillandsia seedlings on top, when I pruned all the dead stems of my Passiflora from the patio lattice work roof). Abandoned cars. Slower growing plants. (If you think I am kidding, look at my Plumeria, which is disappearing beneath my *T. usenoides* patch!) I can stick those little buggers almost anywhere and some of them will thrive. The whitest ones grow in full sun on iron fencing, and the greener ones grow in deep shade on foliage trees. Just wrap string around one and let it swing in the wind. Also makes good cat toys, if your cats are vegetarian and think these are vegetarian mice.

Thus far, the sides of the house are mostly off limits. The only reasons for this are that I would need to knock holes in the walls in order to attach the plants. Then when I water them the water grows into green slime trails down the side of the house, then gets into the house and grows fungus and shorts out electricity. So if anyone out there has a self-sticking Tillandsia that grows without watering, PLEASE let me know.

I am bankrupt.

Please Don't Eat Your Bromeliads

This article is taken from the July 2004 Caloosahatchee Meristem, newsletter of the Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society.

Of course you know that we can eat and enjoy the pineapple, but that is our limit. In many remote areas in Central and South America, however, the Indians still live off the land as their ancestors did. Many of the remote villages are far from civilization. There are no roads, no electricity; so no electric lights, refrigerators, freezers, microwave ovens, and certainly no Seven-Elevens. But, there are plenty of bromeliads, and they are used for many purposes.

Bromelia balansae is one of the most beautiful bromeliads when in bloom. It is a large terrestrial plant found in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay at elevations of 150 to 3,000 feet. The leaves are 2 to 4 feet long with exceedingly sharp spines.

When the plant is ready to bloom, the central heart of the green leaves turns brilliant red, and a massive chalky white head bearing many small maroon and

white petaled flowers rises from it – sometimes to a height of 4 feet. The bracts are bright red/ It produces an inflorescence that bears a fruit similar to a persimmon. Just don't try to eat it! Believe me! I tried it on a dare, and that was a great mistake. It is extremely sour!

However, the Indians of the mountains boil or bake the fruit and use it as a vegetable. The ripe fruit is also fermented to make a very potent drink similar to Tequila. Every part of this bromeliad is used. The spines are removed and the leaves are used to weave baskets, hats, etc. Fences of this bromeliad keep out unwanted animals, other tribes, or unwanted children.

If you want this bromeliad in your collection, be very careful to keep it under control. The mother plant sends out long stolons after blooming, and the new plant grows until you have a thick patch. The best thing to do is keep only two of these plants unless you are using them for hedges to protect a part of your property. Then either dig out emerging stolons with a shovel or chop them to pieces. If you give a Bromelia to a friend, make sure you get a signed statement that they will not sue you if they don't contain their plant. **DON'T TRY TO GROW IT IN A POT!** It will just break the pot and continue to roam. They are beautiful, but wicked; and they will thrill you when they bloom.



This photo of *Bromelia balansae* is taken by Dr. Richard H. Knee and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Collecting Seed

This article by Kathy Dorr originally appeared in [The Bulletin of the Long Beach – Lakewood Bromeliad Study Group](#), Volume IX, Number 12, December 1984.

The question is frequently asked, “How do I collect seed from bromeliads?” To answer this, one must differentiate from the various genera.

Abromeitiella (now **Deuterocohnia**) – produces a seed ‘berry’ carefully tucked in where the flower was. When this berry becomes ‘soft’ and easy to remove, the seeds are ready to harvest.

Aechmea – produces seed ‘berries’ which usually change color when seed is produced, i.e., *Aechmea luddemmaniana* has white berries that turn blue, etc. When these berries become soft to the touch and remove easily, the seeds are ready to harvest.

Billbergia – produces seed berries. They remain the same color in most instances. Some, such as *Billbergia viridiflora*, will change color. When the berries become soft to the touch (perhaps I should say ‘squeeze’) and remove easily, the seeds are ready to harvest.

Cryptanthus – a berry will develop deep down from where the flower emerged. When the berry is soft to the touch, it is time to harvest the seed. I have yet to be able to remove the entire berry by pulling. It has been a matter of ‘digging’ the seed out.

Dyckia – dry dehiscent pods of seed develop on the flowering stalk. As soon as the seed is ready to harvest, the pods open and the seed ‘flies’ all over the area. The best way to collect the seed is when the first pod opens, place a paper bag over the entire inflorescence and tie it with a string or use one of the closures from a loaf of bread to completely close the bag. Some use a plastic bag, but I have found it seems to collect moisture on the inside that causes the seed to deteriorate; I prefer the paper bag. After a week or ten days, tear a small hole in the top and check to see if most of the pods have opened. If so, break off the entire stalk and you will find you have captured the seed inside the bag. (*Editor’s note: If you are doing this outside you might want to cover the paper bag with a plastic bag open on the bottom to keep the paper bag dry*).

Fosterella – this plant produces what seems like ‘millions’ of seeds. One even wonders why the world is not inundated with them. To collect these seeds use the same method suggested for Dyckias.

Guzmania – produces seed pods which ‘explode’ and expel ‘feathery’ type seed. In those such as *Guzmania sanguinea* you can usually capture the majority of them (it flowers in the center). On others, if in doubt, try the bag method.

Neoregelia-Nidularium – produces seed berries down in the cups. When you can pull them out very easily, the seed is usually ready for harvesting. The berry will be soft and the seed will squeeze out quite readily.

Orthophytum – very much like Cryptanthus.

Tillandsia – again we have the seed pods which burst and hurl their feathery contents. Use the bag method.

Portea – seeds appear in berries and treat as you would Aechmeas.

Vriesea – Treat the same as Tillandsias.

When gathering the seed from the berry type bromeliad, it is suggested that you squeeze the seed into a container of water to wash the sticky material from the seed – particularly if you intend to store the seed for any time. I have found that squeezing it into a small jar of water and leaving it for about twelve hours, shaking the jar every time I happen to be in the vicinity, then draining it and drying it on a paper plate completely cleans the seed. Some add a little detergent to the water.

Do not store seed in a plastic bag or container. It seems to increase the problems of ‘damp off’ and what I call ‘hairy’ seeds. By this I mean the seed will develop a fuzzy appearance but will never germinate. You can purchase coin envelopes in many stores and these are excellent to store the seed.



Here is *Fosterella spectabilis*, one of the bromeliads that seem to produce millions of seeds. Photo is by Ken Marks and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO (BSSF)

The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Recreation room of the San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Meetings feature educational lectures and displays of plants. Go to the affiliate section of the BSI webpage for information about our meetings.

The BSSF publishes a monthly newsletter that comes with the membership. Annual dues are single (\$15), dual (\$20). To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and check made payable to the BSSF to:

Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

BSSF 2007 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT	Carl Carter	510-661-0568	carl.carter@ekit.com
VICE PRESIDENT	Bruce McCoy	510-835-3311	bruce.mccoy@gmail.com
SECRETARY	Dorothy Dewing	650-856-1441	
TREASURER	Harold Charns	415-861-6043	Harold@States-Street.com
DIRECTORS:	Keith Anderson	650-529-1278	e2keith@comcast.net
	Roger Lane	650-949-4831	rdodger@pacbell.net
	Marilyn Moyer	650-365-5560	MarilynMoyer@comcast.net
	Peder Samuelsen	650-365-5560	Pedersam@comcast.net
	Peter Wan	408-605-2637	peterkwan@earthlink.net

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY
OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Roger Lane
Newsletter Editor
551 Hawthorne Court
Los Altos, CA 94024-3121

Dues for our society are now overdue!
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