BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO

August 2007

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, August 16, 2007** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

August Program

Bromeliads of Peru – from the Amazon to the Andes

Cristy Brenner is a community college geography teacher from Southern California (Orange County). She has been addicted to Bromeliads for about twelve years and has been an active member of the Saddleback Valley Bromeliad Society. As an avid world traveler who has visited all of the continents, she now prefers to travel to regions where Bromeliads are found in the wild. She has presented talks to many societies on Costa Rica, Argentina, and Peru and she spoke at the 2006 San Diego World conference on Bromeliads of Trinidad and Tobago. This year she participated in a cactus and Bromeliad trip to Brazil with Guillermo Rivera, the guide that many of our members have had on their trips to South America. Cristy will also make a trip to the Tapuis of Venezuela this year.

It has been a while since we have had a show on Peru, so try to make this meeting.

Our plant table will consist of plants left over from the June sale.

August Refreshments

Harold Charns and **Dorothy Dewing** will provide refreshments this month**.**

This is *Alcantarea edmundoi*, one of the larger bromeliads. Photo is by Dr. Peter Sack and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies

BSSF Peninsula Garden Tour was Terrific!

YEAH!!

Thanks to our hosts **Keith** and **Beverly Anderson**, **Tom Vincze**, **Peter Wan**, and **Roger Lane** for opening their homes for us to visit their awesome plant collections. We especially thank **Marilyn Moyer** and **Peder Samuelsen** for hosting the potluck. As usual the BSSF membership came out to have a great time together and share a beautiful spread of delicious food. Tom and Marilyn did a great job of organizing the day which was sunny and warm and otherwise perfect.

Hopefully we will have some photos on the website in the near future. [We expect to have pictures in the next newsletter – Ed.]

Thanks to everyone for keeping in the spirit of our society.
To promote knowledge, cultivation and enthusiasm for bromeliads.

Cheerfully Dan

Garden Days

BSSF braved the cold and wind last Saturday, August 4, for the annual Garden Days event in Golden Gate Park.. This event is designed to expose the general public wandering through the Golden Gate Park gardens to the various San Francisco Plant Societies. **Harold Charns** helped with set-up and **Dan Arcos**, **Harold**, and **Carl Carter** met the public. The meager selection of display plants along with the weather may have dampened our appeal. We did sell a few plants left over from our June sale and were able to make contact with a couple of potential new members.

Bromeliad Basics: Removing Offsets

This article by Karen Andreas is reprinted from "Orlandiana", the March 2004 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Central Florida.

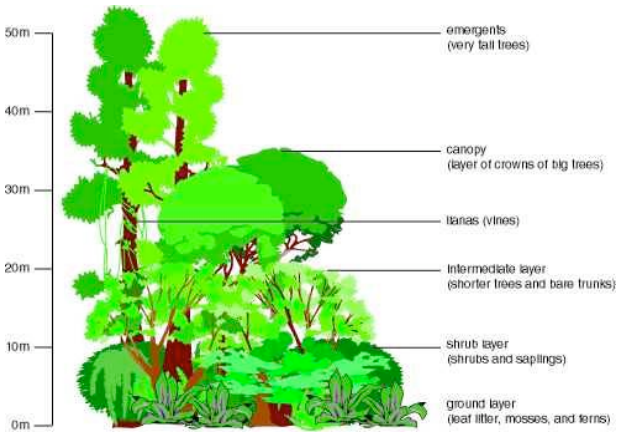
Bromeliads reproduce by setting seeds and also by growing offsets, also known as pups – often from the base or between the leaves of the mother plant. Removing pups generally is easy to do.

The decision on whether or not to remove pups depends on the growth habit of the bromeliad. Neoregelias generally need room to achieve a round, symmetrical appearance and so those pups should be removed. There are Neoregelias, however, that are the exception to the rule. Neoregelias that have stoloniferous growth such as Neoregelia Fireball can be allowed to grow into clumps. Stolons are those woody stems that send the offset out and away from the mother as opposed to growing close to her base. Other bromeliads that have upright, tank-type growth may be allowed to grow in clusters. These include Aechmea, Billbergia, Guzmania, and some Vrieseas. While you can let these grow into clusters, often removing the pups will stimulate the mother plant to produce more pups. Sooner or later, however, you will need to thin the clump to provide better air circulation and room for the increasing growth.

The general rule of thumb is to remove the offset when it is half to two-thirds the size of the mother plant. If your goal is to produce as many pups as possible, you can remove them at a smaller size, but leaving them until they get a little larger increases their viability. Remove the pup by using sharp clippers and cutting it as close to the base of the mother plant as possible. If the mother bromeliad is in a pot, you may have to remove it from the pot to get a clean cut. If it is in the ground, you may need to dig some of the soil away from the base so you can see what you are doing and make a good cut. Once the pup has been removed from the mother, you can let the cut end harden in the air before replanting. This gives the cut tissue time to toughen up before putting it in soil or mounting it. Dip the cut end in Root Tone to promote root growth and also provide fungus protection. Pot the newly liberated pup in a medium that drains well. You may need to stake it until it gets established in its new home.

Cryptanthus pups are the easiest offsets to remove. Once the Cryptanthus pup gets large enough, hold the pup and gently tug. If it is ready to be removed, it will release from the mother plant. If it resists, try again in a few days. Once you separate it from the mother, you may need to remove the small leaves at the base of the pup, dip the end n Root Tone, and plant in a well draining potting mix.

Although most bromeliads bloom only once in their lives, their pups ensure that they live in our collections – and provide extras for us to share!



Where Bromeliads Grow

This article was originally printed in the Bromeliad Society Bulletin Vol VII, No. 6, 1957 and is being reprinted from February 1984 newsletter of the Bromeliad Study Group of Northern California.

In the time of Linnaeus, it became common practice to begin to designate specific geographic areas of the different species of the plants. This led to the knowledge that climatic conditions were a definite determining factor in plant and animal life.

There are mutual relationships among the inhabitants of an environment, but this is also often competitive. Competition would be defined as organisms (perhaps even the same species) which have the same requirements. The end results being all plants living for some time, but gradually the strongest take over and the weakest ones are eliminated. In an environment where there is no interference, the competition is so strong, no new species can penetrate unless there is some type of upheaval by natural or other forces. In some instances, natural hybrids of bromeliads have been found in perimeters between environments which contained different types, but this is rare.

In the rain forests, there is stratification of growth among all the organisms. The taller or upper strata naturally shades or partially shades the lower strata, which means any organism which cannot grow under low light conditions cannot survive in the lower strata.

In the rain forests of Brazil, the average height of the trees is eighty feet. Shrubs reach the heights of three to twelve feet; saplings are from fifteen to forty feet and the palms reach seventy feet.

There are four strata of growing Bromeliads in the rain forests, with the first being at ground level. Nidulariums and Cryptanthus grow in the forest humus with the Nidulariums helping to provide some of the humidity as they hold enormous amounts of water. The Nidulariums will grow up as far as the base of trees and shrubs.

The second strata consists of about the mid trunk level and covers an area of about twenty-five feet. Vrieseas predominate in this area. They start at about six feet above the ground and continue up to the level just below the first limbs on the high trees. They also are found in the top of the shrub growth. They receive a little more light than the plants at ground level.

The third strata are found on the level of the first limbs, growing from the base of the limbs on out to the outer parts of the limbs. This includes Aechmeas, Canistrums, Wittrockias and again Vrieseas which have more light and humidity requirements. The light at this level is of medium intensity.

The fourth strata contain those bromeliads which need relatively little humidity, but must have great light intensity. This group is made up primarily of Tillandsias with a few Vrieseas. These are placed where they receive direct sun.

The Bromeliads do not seem to favor one species of tree over another. Light intensity and humidity seem to determine the growing conditions, according to the needs of the particular plant. If a plant falls to the ground level from above, it usually does not survive and conversely if a plant is taken from the ground level and placed higher in the strata of growth, it usually will not survive.

This only strengthens the point that when tampering is done at any level, it has an overall effect. When the tall trees are destroyed, all strata are involved and it can mean the entire environment must change accordingly. Or, if the humidity bearing plants growing at the first level are destroyed, again, all levels are disturbed.

It becomes very evident that in order to provide an environment that is beneficial to all organisms (plant and animal alike) we must stop destroying and/or tampering with so much of the world's surface. It is of utmost importance that we discontinue the practice of desecrating so many of the earth's resources and environments. "As ye sow, so shall ye reap."

Growing Alcantarea Species

This article by Theresa M. Bert is reprinted from the January 2007 Orlandiana, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Central Florida.

Bromeliads in the genus Alcantarea are native to eastern Brazil where they grow terrestrially in open places. Most of them grow in full sun, on granite outcrops (inselbergs) that can soar up to 500 feet above rivers; tropical forests and cultivated fields; in cracks where water percolates through granite. Many of them were formerly in the genus Vriesea. Most are very large (3-5 feet in diameter at full size) and have brightly colored, lightly colored or white and green inflorescences that are spectacular – up to 7-8 feet tall, with multiple branches; large, sometimes colorful bracts; and lovely three-petaled yellow or white flowers with long protruding stamens. Many have flowers with long petals that curve backward and sideways, like lovely curls at the ends. Don't hold your breath waiting for these plants to flower – they can be 10 or more years old before they flower. But it's worth the wait!

You will need space to grow these plants. Alcantarea species can be grown in a loose mix of potting soil, a little charcoal, and Perlite. Increase pot size as they grow. They eventually become so heavy that the bases lean and press against the edge of the pot. At this time, they'll fall over when loaded with water unless some preventative measure is taken. I usually pot them in plastic pots and place these pots into heavy clay pots. Sometimes I also need to counterbalance the base of the plant by putting a brick or two in the plastic pot on the side opposite the plant base.

This is *Alcantarea vinicolor* flower spike. Photo is by Michael Schmale & Lynn Fieber and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Some species and varieties (e.g. *A. imperialis* Red) tend to rot at the base; to guard against this, grow those plants in pure Perlite and porous rock (e.g. commercially available lava rock), with lots of time-released fertilizer (avoid placing the fertilizer so that it touches the plant base).
They respond well to time-released fertilizer (I use 6-month time-released Nutricote, also available as Dynamite). They also do well in the ground. If covered with light frost cloth or sheets, they survive light frosts without damage. I grow them in my yard in full sun or partial shade and in a shade house, sitting high above all other plants. Plant or place them in locations where you won't need to move them after they're full grown. An Alcantarea holding even a little water can weigh 80-100 pounds.

The pups on Alcantarea grow from the trunk. Small "grass pups" with thin leaves can appear beneath the leaves when the plant is small through full-sized.

These can be removed when they're about 4-5 inches long and potted. They are not easily removed because the base is recurved into the trunk of the parent plant. To remove them, dig the potting mix away from the plant, grasp the pup by the base, and wiggle it from side to side, while simultaneously pulling the pup a bit away from the mother plant. Very robust pups frequently appear after the plant has bloomed (cut off the inflorescence) if time-released fertilizer pellets are placed between the leaves. [My *A. vinicolor* has developed 3 pups without removing the inflorescence or using any time-released fertilizer - Ed.]. Sometimes it is possible to get a dozen or more pups by using this method. To remove those pups, I remove all leaves below them and use the same technique described above for the grass pups. The best way to get them to root is to insert them between the parent plant's trunk and a big remaining leaf until they develop roots, which takes a few months. For me, that works better than potting them.

This is *Alcantarea vinicolor* flower spike. Photo is by Peter Franklin and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Few bromeliad enthusiasts seem to grow Alcantarea species, probably because they are so big. But if you want a unique interesting landscape, try plants of this genus. They can tolerate some leaf litter accumulation, but not acorns or rotting leaves left in their centers for months. Several large species available for cultivation are cold-tolerant, easy to grow and spectacular (e.g. *A. imperialis*, *A. odorata*, *A. extensa*, *A. brasiliana*, *A. vinicolor*, and *A. heloisae*). *A. imperialis*, the most popular species, comes in several colors. The broad stiff spineless leaves are green above and green or various shades of red or purple beneath. A. odorata can be purchased with varying degrees of trichome (scurf) coverage. Those with thick coverings (e.g. cultivar Silver) are fuzzy or snowy-looking and interestingly beautiful.

This is *Alcantarea odorata*. Photo is by Reginaldo Baião 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.

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Join us for a Slide Show on Bromeliads of Peru!