

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



October 2005

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 20, 2005** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

October Program

Unusual Bromeliad Genera

This month, **Roger Lane** will provide a slide show on some of the unusual bromeliad genera. This will include plants that we are not be able to grow because we can not replicate their native environment, plants that are too big, and plants that are not available commercially. If you grow some of the uncommon genera, bring them in for show-and-tell.

Our plant table will include plants from Michael's Bromeliads in Florida and we do have some plants that most of us do not grow.

October Refreshments

Marilyn Moyer and Peder Samuelson will provide refreshments this month.



Here are **David, Marilyn and Ernie** during last month's garden tour. Photo is courtesy of **Peder Samuelson**.



Here is another **Peder Samuelson** photo of some of our members at last month's garden tour. Included in the photo are **Dennis and Brian**.

September Meeting

Last month **Woody Minnich** provided a wonderful slide show of one of his trips to Brazil. It is amusing that our members could identify most of the non-bromeliads, but when we saw a bromeliad slide we had different answers as to what that bromeliad was. Obviously, these plants look a lot different in habitat than in cultivation.

Woody also brought some cactus, succulents, and tillandsias for sale. The succulents went over better than the tillandsias.

San Francisco Chronicle Article

Thanks to **Bruce McCoy**, we have gotten some publicity about bromeliads with a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper. This is an e-mail that Bruce wrote about the article.

It's my understanding that the article Katherine Endicott wrote about bromeliads and their impressive beauty for the Northern California landscape will be a feature article in this Wednesday's 10/5/05 Home & Garden section of the San Francisco Chronicle. She joined us on our gardens tour in the East Bay a number of weeks ago and wrote her article about bromeliads in response to the amazing plants and gardens she encountered that day with us. Lynette Evans, the Home & Garden editor at the Chronicle, emailed me on Friday for help with identification (thanks to all who helped me with that) on a few images that will be used along with Katherine's story. She indicated that this story is set to run this coming Wednesday.

Hopefully, this piece will help propel bromeliads into the minds of those who are attracted to tropical plants and want to grow them outside in their gardens. The draft of the story that I read for Katherine suggests that the BSSF is a terrific place for folks to come with questions about bromeliads and is a warm community of plant enthusiasts... let's hope this article brings some new folks to our group!

We all owe Dan Arcos and David Feix warm thanks for organizing such a beautiful tour. And of course, a sincere thanks to our members and friends who opened their lovely gardens.

Solving the Fireball Mystery

This article is taken from the July 1998 Pup talk, newsletter of the Saddleback Valley Bromeliad Society. It was written by Nat DeLeon and originally appeared in the February 1998 newsletter of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

In 1959 I wrote to a Mr. Walter Doering of Sao Vicente Brazil in the state of Sao Paulo. Mr. Doering was primarily an orchid collector who had earlier written an article on the bromeliads of his area for The Bromeliad Society Bulletin, the forerunner of the Journal of the Bromeliad Society.

During that time, I wrote to whoever I could in the hope of being able to purchase or trade for new bromeliads not already in cultivation. In this instance I was primarily interested in buying at least half-grown plants of *Vriesea* [*Alcantarea* – Ed.] *gigantea* and *Vriesea hieroglyphica*. He had several other species I was interested in as well.

Once Mr. Doering had confirmed that he would sell me the plants, I inquired about the possibility of buying other species as well, even if he had only a few plants of each. He replied that yes, he did have others but they were unidentified plants he numbered so that we might have a common reference point to refer to on any specific plant in the future. I would grow the plants to flowering, have them identified and, should they prove ornamental enough, I would order additional plants by name and number. Mr. Doering was agreeable to this.

Correspondence was slow and Mr. Doering needed time to collect and prepare the plants for shipment. This was no small order. In March 1960, almost a year after my initial inquiry, the plants arrived. There were more than 200 plants in the shipment. Losses were heavy, particularly of *V. hieroglyphica*. Only eight out of some fifty large plants survived. Losses of other species occurred also but were far less severe.

This shipment proved to be very important, for it represented the first bromeliad introduction into American horticulture of the following species: *V. bituminosa*, the large form of *V. incurvata* (then *V. rostrum-aquilae*), *V. ensiformis*, *V. flammea*, *V. erythroactylon*, *V. phillipo-coburgii*, *V. scalaris*, *V. vagans*, *Nidularium rosulatum*, *Nidularium rubens*, *Nidularium rutilans*, *Neoregelia doeringiana* (a new species to be named), *Neoregelia maculata*, and our mystery plant *Neoregelia* 'Fireball'.

Only one of the four plants, later to be called *Neoregelia* Fireball survived. As I remember it, the smallish plant was almost all green, with a faint hint of red, when received. Mr. Doering remarked about the plant in the brief note he sent with the unidentified

plants: “Neoregelia or Aechmea, small plant, all mahogany colored. Flowers not yet seen.”

After the plant started to grow, exposed to the great Florida light, the mahogany color continued to intensify. Before long it sent out its first offset, revealing its stoloniferous habit.

The late Ralph Davis and I were rather close bromeliad buddies. As long as either of us had more than one of any given plant, his plants were my plants and vice versa. We lent one another plant for hybridizing or selfing. We also collaborated on several important ventures. Ralph visited me one day and almost swallowed his cigar butt when he first saw my mystery plant. Of course Ralph had to have one and since by that time the plant had two offsets, the first vegetative propagation took place. Since I was concerned about confusion in plant names even in those days I made Ralph promise he would not part with any plants until it flowered and I could have it identified.

Several years passed and our stocks of the mystery plant were getting quite large but there was still no sign of flowering. In the meantime, many people were starting to pester Ralph for a plant which made it great ‘trade bait’. I didn’t have that problem since at that time I grew most of my bromeliads at the Parrot Jungle, away from public view. Ralph wanted to start letting some plants go and I agreed, provided we gave the plant a temporary name. Ralph told me that every time he referred to the plant he called it *Neoregelia* Fireball and I told him, “That’s a great name; let’s call it that.” The rest is history.

During the latter part of 1966 I was getting ready to treat some *Neoregelia carolinae* plants with calcium carbide to induce flowering. Just for the hell of it, I decided to treat a single mature plant of Fireball as well. In February of 1967, I saw my first Fireball flower ever. I had waited eight years to see this. By contrast, I had flowered and had identified all of the other unidentified plants in the importation group.

During those eight years I wrote to Mr. Doering several times, hoping to be able to order more Fireballs and other species as well. I had also hoped to obtain information for Dr. Lyman Smith on collection sites for the various species being identified, but I never heard from Mr. Doering again.

My records show that on February 28, 1967 I sent the first flowering Fireball plant to Dr. Smith for identification. It bore my number P.130. I have a letter of confirmation of that specimen, saying it needed further study. Years later, I have yet to receive any word of its status. I was told by several people that the National Herbarium does not have a specimen

of Fireball. I can only assume it somehow got misplaced or perhaps included in the file of some other *Neoregelia*.

During the last decade or so, *Neoregelia* Fireball has been a point of much confusion. It has been assumed to be a hybrid. This is understandable as many people in horticulture assume a plant is a hybrid if it does not have a Latinized name. Yet there is nothing wrong with giving an unidentified species a temporary cultivar name. I have sometimes used the name of the town or area a plant was collected from as a reference point. One of the plants from this collection I called *Nidularium* “Saopaulo”. It was later identified as *Nidularium rutilans*. Yet I still see plants around labeled as *Nidularium* Sao Paulo and it is usually referred to as a hybrid, which it is not.

Bob Wilson also used this method of identification. Plants he sold as *Neoregelia* Tingua were later identified as *Neoregelia carolinae*. Plants he sold as *Aechmea* Tingua turned out to be *Aechmea lingulata*. The name Tingua referred to the town in Brazil near which he collected the plants.

A few years ago the name *Neoregelia schultzi* was being applied to Fireball. How this started, I don’t know. The name is not listed in Dr. Smith’s monograph.

While I am still hopeful that *Neoregelia* Fireball will someday be properly named, I have not pursued the matter. After 26* years, it would be difficult to refer to *Neoregelia* Fireball by any other name.

[It is now 38 years and the mystery remains. Ed.]

Caring For Tillandsia Clumps

This article by Len Colgan is taken from the February 2002 The BROMELIADVISORY, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida.

In the common parlance of *Tillandsia* taxonomists, there are the ‘lumpers’ and the ‘splitters’. By these terms, it is meant to distinguish those who always look for similarities between two plants under investigation (hoping to

prove they are the same species or subspecies or linked varieties) from those who always look for differences, in the belief or hope that one of them is new. However, in a different context, the language of mere collectors like myself involves the ‘clumpers’ and the ‘dividers’.

The first term is commonly used to distinguish those tillandsia (and other genera) collectors who prefer to have their plants form large clumps rather than dividing them up on a regular basis. Those who have inspected my collection will definitely agree that I am a clumper. However, there are inherent risks in such an approach.

When asked what are the most important aspects in successfully growing mounted tillandsias, I always respond with the following five necessities:

- Good fresh air movement
- Good light
- Good fresh air movement
- Regular watering
- Good fresh air movement.

There are a number of species that I encourage to form large clumps. These include the common *T. aeranthos*, *T. bergeri*, *T. crocata*, *T. ionantha*, *T. ixioides*, *T. jucunda*, *T. juncea*, *T. magnusiana*, *T. paleacea*, *T. recurvifolia* (including var. *subsecundifolia*), *T. stricta*, *T. tenuifolia*, and *T. x floridiana*, etc. These are invariably attached to natural cork bark and hung from mesh inside shade cloth covered frames. In one situation however, tillandsias are hung from both sides of a common shade cloth support and it is here that problems have arisen.

At the end of the last wet winter, the back one third or many large tillandsia clumps in this situation was found to be dead. I had to remove large dead sections of *T. aeranthos*, *T. bergeri*, *T. stricta*, etc.

Although one of the above necessities, namely regular watering, had been available, it proved that adversely, good light and (most importantly) good fresh air movement were missing. Clearly, all of the plants at the back part of the clumps – facing the shade cloth with plants on the other side were deprived of vital natural light and air

and so rotted. No such problems existed for individual plants or sparsely growing specimens.

What should we do to avoid this? Assuming you still wish to create large tillandsia clumps, I recommend:

- Before the wet season arrives, carefully remove old plants and leaves, especially near the center of the clump.
- Place the clump in a situation that maximizes the light and air movement from all directions.

In the future, all my clumps will be prepared for the wet season.



Here is a large clump of *Neoregelia* Fireball. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Autumn Chores

This article by Daniel Arcos originally appeared in the October 1979 publication of the Bromeliad Study Group of Northern California.

With autumn’s arrival bromeliad growers begin to take precautions with plants that have been summering out of doors. Many of the tenderest will be brought indoors or into the greenhouse. To account for lack of space, offsets will be removed (the plant table will find homes for these), and old mothers cut out after giving their best in pups. However, if you are like me, many

of your bromeliads will have to face the brunt of the winter rains that Northern California usually gets.

Silver tillandsias are moved to sheltered locations out of the rain, but tillandsias like *T. violacea*, *T. imperialis*, and *T. lieboldiana* will stay right out in it and be the better for it. One member brought a *T. violacea* to a meeting this summer that had withstood -8C (18F) in Marin County last winter.

All Pitcairnioideae can be left out except for the most tender Dyckias and Pitcairnias [Hechtias should also be brought in. Ed.]

Aechmeas, Neoregelias, and the other Bromelioideae plants should have a little shelter, and if there is a threat of frost or a freeze the water should be removed from the cups. A member from Sacramento left his *Portea petropolitana* var. *petropolitana* outside last winter just because he couldn't find enough space for it inside the house. The result was that in the spring the *Portea* bloomed with a fantastically healthy inflorescence and this winter he will have even hardier pups.

Listen to the weatherman this winter and in case of frost, sheets, blankets, and newspapers can quickly protect your bromeliads. You can use plastic sheeting too though I keep hearing that the plastic freezes too and if it is touching any foliage, that part of the plant will suffer damage.

Rot is a terrible thing in winter and the damage it causes may not be realized until the spring when centers start falling out. This is primarily caused by the prolonged wetness that accompanies the cold. One reason to keep susceptible bromeliads out of the rain. But which ones are susceptible? Probably all. I've lost plants; others in my neighborhood did not, and vice versa. Certainly microclimates play a large part in determining which plants will suffer and which will not but nothing is predictable with bromeliads. So we can only guess at what this winter will bring and we will learn from it by watching its effects on our plants and discussing them with fellow growers.



This is a *Portea petropolitana* in flower seen on the East Bay Garden Tour. Photo is by **Peder Samuelesen**.

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:

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