

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



December 2006

NEWSLETTE

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, December 21, 2006** at 7:00 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

December Program

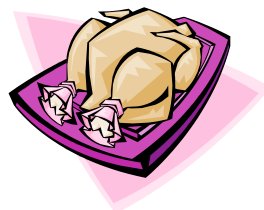
Holiday Potluck and Gift Exchange

This month culminates another year for our society. Our membership grew quite a bit, but we do not get to see most of these new members at our meetings. Why don't you new members try to join us for the holiday potluck? Our annual trip to the member's gardens was a wonderful opportunity to see diverse collections and beautiful landscaping – culminating in a great potluck. This year we had two plant sales – each was very successful and helped our treasury so we can bring in speakers from greater distances.

Note that our meeting time this month is 7 PM instead of 7:30 PM. There is another activity taking place in the auditorium, so parking may be difficult.

This month's meeting will be an opportunity for us socialize and partake of great food. The society is providing a turkey and honey baked ham. We are asking you to bring a dish to share with the group – drinks, vegetable dish, rolls, desserts, etc. Please try to remember to bring serving silverware for the dish that you bring. We will provide plates, cups, silverware, and napkins. **Dan Arcos** and **Marilyn Moyer** are coordinating the food items. Dan has assembled the items on a spread sheet. If you are not computer literate, **call Marilyn (650-365-5560) or Dan (415-821-7377) to see where you can fill in some of our gaps.**

Our club will provide a plant for each member. You may also bring a special plant/book, etc. for exchange with the other members covered in a paper bag that may or may not be decorated. The idea is to cover up the gift so as to surprise its recipient.



2006 Programs

We enjoyed a wide variety of programs this year and gained several new members into the world of bromeliads. Because of the television and newspaper coverage of our society, many new people are learning about bromeliads. Thanks again to **Bruce McCoy** for getting this publicity for our society. Here are some highlights of our activities this year:

January

Bruce McCoy led a discussion and show-and-tell of winter blooming bromeliads. Our members produced lots of beautiful plants that were in bloom in January. Many of these grow outdoors year round which is a plus for those of us who do not have a greenhouse or have no room in the greenhouse.

February

Peter Wan showed us all how beautiful the Iguazu Falls are and what a diverse set of flora and fauna are found there.

March

Dennis Heckart showed us the transition of his landscape from the time he moved to Hawaii and started planting bromeliads to the present. Dennis also showed us some of the wonderful hybrids that David Shigii is creating in Hawaii. Dennis brought us some of his new *Billbergia* hybrids for our plant table that were in great demand.

April

Jeffrey Kent from Kent's Bromeliads in Vista, California showed us slides of plants from habitats that have been used to create bromeliad hybrids that are commercially distributed around the country. Jeffrey said that he has made 60 trips to Central America and South America in the last 20 years. Over the last 20 years, bromeliad collecting has changed such that seed is collected now where plants used to be collected.

May

Dennis Cathcart from Tropiflora Nursery in Florida showed us slides from Mexico, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Bolivia – all in less than an hour. His topic was “Lithophytic Bromeliads” which means bromeliads that grow on rock surfaces. Many of these rocks are cliffs which were extremely difficult to access – much less photograph the plants growing on the rocks.

June

Guillermo Rivera from Cordoba, Argentina was our speaker this month. He has been a tour guide for many of our members who have on some of his photographic plant tours. Guillermo spoke to us on the bromeliads of Argentina with the focus on the varying types of habitats that bromeliads are found.

July

Although we had no monthly meeting this month, we did get to visit several beautiful gardens in San Francisco with a great potluck dinner at our last stop: Harold Charns. For those of us on the trip, we will all remember how hot it was on Sunday as well as the beautiful plants we got to see.

August

Betty Patterson from Dallas, Texas gave us a slide show on the *Aechmea* genus. She has all of **John Anderson's** (Mr. *Aechmea*) slides and has added more slides. This was her first show on *Aechmeas* which included a group of unusual *Aechmeas* that we do not get to see – either because they are so large or they are very rare.

September

Bruce Holst from Selby Botanical Gardens showed us wonderful scenes of recent expeditions he has made to Venezuela. Bruce is a superb photographer and storyteller and we were treated to photos of *Tapuis*, carnivorous bromeliads, huge *Brochinias*, and a picture of a beautiful *Navia* that has not yet been found in habitat.

October

Tom Vincze showed us wonderful scenes of his trip this summer to Ecuador. Most of the

spectacular bromeliads were not identified by our members. Too bad we had not checked out the photos with the recent books on the Bromeliads of Ecuador before the show. After the show, Tom provided for sale many bromeliads that he had purchased in Ecuador

November

Ron Parsons gave us a slide show of his favorite bromeliads. Although Ron is primarily an orchid grower, he is a great bromeliad grower as well. His slides were stunning and included regular shots and macro photography of individual bromeliads.

The Use of Bromeliads in the Christmas Season

The local people of many Central American and South American countries make extensive use of bromeliads during the Christmas season. The markets, churches, and homes abound with color from the inflorescences of plants in flower this time of the year. This article is a summary of information taken from several Bromeliad Society International (BSI) journals.

Honduras

The country people of Honduras collect several kinds of ornamental plants from the forest and bring them into the markets about Christmas time each year. Bromeliads, orchids, ferns, and aroids are the families of plants most commonly brought in.

Most of the showier Tillandsias are in flower at about this time of year and are the most conspicuous plants in the market due to their brightly colored bracts, and also the most abundant.

There are several Tillandsias that are commonly seen in the Christmas market. The commonest is *Tillandsia fasciculata*, probably because it is an attractive species and is exceedingly abundant in some places.

Tillandsias from the high mountains are brought into the markets also but are always in smaller numbers for they are more widely scattered in the forests and quite often are on tall trees and difficult to secure.

The mountain species observed in the markets in Tegucigalpa or Comayagua are the following: *T. punctulata*, *T. fasciculata* var. *rotundata*, *T. deppiana*, *T. lampropoda*, *T. ponderosa*, *T. orogenes*, and *T. standleyi*.

These seven Tillandsias from the mountains and one from middle elevations are certainly a fine lot of species. The rarest one, *T. ponderosa*, was originally discovered in Guatemala. This species is known to grow in Honduras in the San Juancito and Santa Barbara mountains, and doubtless occurs in other mountain groups here.

Costa Rica

The country folk of Costa Rica go up into the moss forests of the mountains to bring down cart loads of Vriesea, Guzmanias, and Tillandsias which are in flamboyant color at holiday time. In greatest demand are the species with tall branching flower stalks which have the loosely hanging sizeable red bracts – like so many waving ribbons. Varying with the species, these bracts give the vivid touches of rose-red, yellow-red, and cerise (so dear to the heart of an Indian) against a canvas of yellow-greens, blue-greens or olive-greens – all mingled with dashes of bronze or blue.

From the high moss forests, along with the bromeliad flowers, the country folks also gather great sheets of mosses and lichens from trees and rocks to heighten the effect of their naturalistic arrangements, typical of the Christmas season, which they arrange throughout the house, but especially in the “*corredor*”, the open gallery around the patio.

From down along the warm coastal areas brilliant flower heads of *Aechmea magdalenae*, the robust pineapple-like plant, are brought to the highland markets and serve as a sturdy supplement to their flower arrangements.

The principal use of the *Aechmea*, which at one time was called “Ananas”, is for fiber which for centuries has been extracted from its leaves. The native recognizes utility as well as beauty in the plants around him.



Here is the spectacular flower spike of *Aechmea magdalенаe*. Photo is by Wally Berg and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Oaxaca, Mexico

In Mexico, the tradition of using wild gathered plants for Christmas decoration dates from the 16th century. These wild gathered plants sold in open-air markets are used in Christmas decorations in homes and churches.

During the month of December, collected wild plants are offered for sale in the public markets of many towns. The Oaxaca Christmas plant market is noteworthy for several reasons. It is possibly the largest in any provincial town in Mexico: more sellers, more plant species offered, and greater volume of plants sold.

The Oaxaca Christmas plant market, apart from the Oaxaca main market, is located in the center of the town in a plaza facing the cathedral and around the corner from the *zocalo* or the main plaza. The site is excellent; it is centrally located, with tree shade and water from plaza fountains to keep the market plants in fresh condition. The market is very large; in 1975 it was observed that there were 72 selling spaces, each about 10 feet square.

The sellers are mostly Zapotec and Spanish speaking villagers. Most of the sellers are women with husbands who are subsistence farmers who work occasionally in timber-cutting or in a small-scale charcoal production. The December Christmas plant market thus provides an important supplementary income to many peasant families in the Sierra.

The collecting of plants is an activity in which the entire family participates. The collecting sites are usually nearby and within an hour and a half of the village. Men and boys do the tree climbing for the bromeliads and orchids, and for the masses of moss and lichen that grow on pine and rock. Women and girls participate in the ground collection of mosses, lichen, succulents, pine cones, and other plants from the more humid forest areas and rocky sites.

The bromeliads offered for sale at the market include *Catopsis floribunda*, *T. bourgaei*, *T. califani*, *T. carlos-hankii*, *T. dasylirifolia*, *T. fascicularia*, *T. grandis*, *T. karwinskyana*, *T. mexicana*, *T. multicaulis*, *T. oaxacana*, *T. plumosa*, *T. punctulata*, *T. usneoides*, and *T. violacea*.

Central Mexico

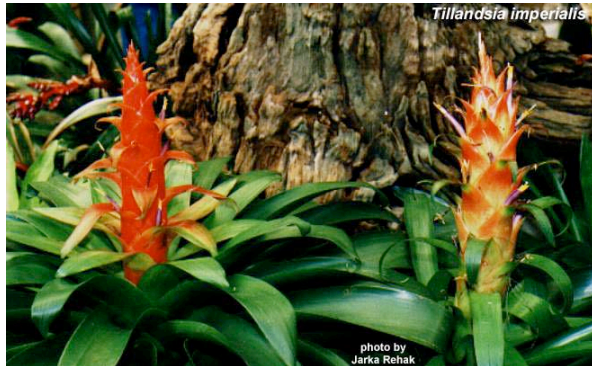
In November and December people from rural areas of central Mexico collect *T. imperialis* to be used to decorate Nativities as well as religious arches placed in front of churches and shrines.

The geographical distribution of the plant follows the oriental side of the eastern Sierra Madre (Hidalgo and Oaxaca) and the eastern portion of the trans-Mexican volcanic belt as well as a disjunct population occurring in El Salvador.

Chiapas, Mexico

Mid-December marks the beginning of preparation to celebrate Christmas season in many communities throughout Chiapas, Mexico. This time of heightened social activity also coincides with the maturation of the tall red inflorescences of *Tillandsia guatemalensis*. As part of the festivities, residents of San Cristobal de la Casas favor these local bromeliads to

decorate their churches and household Nativity scenes. Thousands more, however, are transported over 100 kilometers to the municipalities of Acala and Chiapa de Corza in the Rio Grijalva Basin where *T. guatemalensis* and Christmas Eve have become almost synonymous.



This is the beautiful flower spike of *Tillandsia imperialis*, a bromeliad that we can grow well in the bay area. Photo is by Jarka Rehak and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Peru

During the Christmas season in Qosqo, Peru at an altitude of 3400 m, the natives collect plants from the surrounding countryside and sell them in the local markets. Blue tarpaulins covered with bromeliads are laid out on the pavement. Mounds of grey tillandsias are piled against the walls lining the street, tended by campesino women in traditional dress, sitting on their knees, alert and calling for a sale. Women in traditional dress meander through the market, bent under bales of *Tillandsia usneoides*.

The types of bromeliads sold for Christmas decorations include *T. cauligera*, *T. walteri*, *T. nana*, and *T. usneoides*.



This is the flower spike of *Tillandsia guatemalensis*, used to decorate structures during the Christmas season throughout Chiapas, Mexico. Photo is from Bird Rock Tropicals and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

REFERENCES

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Simon Pierce, The use of *Tillandsia* species in ritual adornment in Qosqo, Peru, *Journal of the Bromeliad Society*, September-October 2000.

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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Happy Holidays!
