

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



November 2004

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, November 18, 2004** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

November Program

Winter Bloomers

This month, our members will be discussing and showing bromeliads that bloom in the winter. **Bruce McCoy** and **Daniel Arcos** will be leading the discussion and these are very knowledgeable growers from our society. Be sure to bring your questions about growing bromeliads in the winter and any of your bromeliads that happen to be in flower.



Your editor has 2 different *Aechmea ramosa* species that are currently in spike, so this is a winter bloomer. Photo is by Geoff Lawn and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

November Refreshments

No one has signed up for refreshments this month, so it will be pot luck of refreshments from the members coming to the meeting.

December Meeting

In December we have our annual holiday potluck, so set aside **16 December** on your calendar for socializing with the members and partaking of great food. Our society will provide 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. We will have a signup sheet at this month's meeting for the item you plan to bring.

October Meeting

Peder Samuelson demonstrated what a wonderful photographer he is in his show on the bromeliads of northwestern Argentina that some of our members saw in person on a trip last October. Peder's show took advantage of some of the latest software that blends music and varying transition mechanisms for each slide, such that the show was more like a movie than a slide show. Although it was very fast paced, we got to see many more slides than we would have seen in a conventional slide show, and we all enjoyed it immensely.

Marilyn Moyer provided a fantastic plant table, as she always does, so most of us went home with some new treasures.

Guzmania gloriosa in habitat, Bogota Colombia cloud forest

photo by
Ignacio Moreno



This is a habitat photo of *Guzmania gloriosa* in a cloud forest near Bogota, Colombia by Ignacio Moreno. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Slate of Officers and Directors for 2005

At this month's meeting we will have nomination of officers and board of directors for next year.

San Miguel Greenhouse is Closing

Pamela and Jim Leaver are closing their San Miguel Greenhouse in Concord. Apparently, the closing has been re-scheduled to **15 December**. So if you are interested in some bromeliads, please call them at (925) 933-7908.

Guzmania Culture Can Be Easy

This article is by Jeffrey Kent who has spoken to our society and is responsible for creating several hybrids at Kent's Bromeliad Nursery in Vista, California. The article is taken from the January 2000 Illawarra Bromeliad Society Incorporated Newsletter.

Over the years, I have often heard the phrase, "I can't grow Guzmanias!" This kind of comment disappoints me because I feel that the inflorescences and bracts of species and hybrids of *Guzmania* rival the finest orchid flowers in both brilliance and durability. In the last several years, many new and easy to grow hybrids, which are unequalled in the plant world for their beauty, have become available. If more growers are acquainted with the native habitats of the species, the relatively easy to provide culture requirements for both species and hybrids might be better understood.

The majority of the *Guzmanias* are found in the mountainous regions of Costa Rica, Ecuador, Columbia and northern Peru. Rarely found near sea level, they prefer the abundant rainfall and cooler conditions which prevail at elevations from 1000 feet to over 10,000 feet. The typical habitat is a cool, moist, and dark forest. The trees in such a setting are generally laden with all types of mosses and lichens. In a well-developed forest, the majority of the trees are quite tall but the *Guzmanias* are rarely found in the upper layer of the forest canopy. Usually they are within 25

feet of the ground; the larger species are found growing quite commonly as terrestrials in leaf mold, particularly in forests at elevations above 5,000 feet. Some species are found growing in “cloud forest” environments, in which the microclimates include daily periods of fog. In such regions of very high humidity, torrential rains are infrequent, so the plants are watered by condensation on their leaf surface.

Whilst it is very difficult to make generalizations for the culture of all of the species in the genus, as a rule of thumb, the higher the elevation of the native habitat, the cooler the nights must be for successful culture. Plants from lower elevations, during extreme heat, require cool, moist and shady environments.

Another major factor for successful culture is a potting mix which provides a continually acid environment. One part of peat moss, with three parts of pine bark, can be used and is a recommended ideal potting mix. For a fertilizer, super phosphate or dolomite can be added to the mix to yield a final pH of about 6.0. Guzmanias require acidic conditions, but also need calcium and magnesium (both are found in dolomite), nitrogen, phosphorous and especially potassium for optimum growth. Adding two-thirds-strength fertilizer, the ideal condition consists of dark green leaves with considerable sheen. Adding diluted fertilizer to the watering serves the dual purpose of feeding and maintaining a low pH in the water. It is wise to check the pH (litmus paper from the chemist works well) of the water when fertilizer is added for the first time, since some commercial products are somewhat basic in nature and can actually increase the pH when added to water.

Fertilizers containing zinc and copper should be avoided because Guzmanias tend to accumulate these toxic elements in their leaf tissues over a period of time. “Quilling” is often associated with toxic levels of zinc and copper.

If extreme summer heat is a problem, the floor of a shade house or patio is preferable to the inside of a greenhouse during the summer season. In winter, Guzmanias should be kept away from the drying heat of a heater, since most will grow

easily at about 50° F if kept on the dry side. If the soil is kept moist and the water in the cup is changed frequently, Guzmanias seem to thrive on neglect indoors. The low light conditions normally prevalent are ideal for growth and if flowering is desired artificial light can provide the stimulus.

The many hybrids available for purchase are very vigorous and easy to grow. Chosen for their rapid growth and durability, the beginner would do best to start with these. As for species, a little research will help to eliminate those species from unsuitable altitudes for any particular area. A partial list for warmer areas includes *G. sanguinea* (all forms), *G. weberbaueri*, *G. scherzeriana*, *G. zahnii* (both the species and its hybrids require humidity), *G. eduardii*, and *G. xanthobracteata*. A list of species from the higher altitudes suitable for cooler areas includes *G. pennellii*, *G. gloriosa*, *G. striata*, *G. sibundoyorum*, *G. variegata*, and *G. lindenii*.

When acquiring any Guzmanias, however, be certain that the plants are well established and possess a reasonably well-developed root system.

It should be apparent now that success with Guzmanias is easy, if only a little thought and care is applied to their culture.

Tillandsia tectorum

This article by Kenny Graham is taken from the May 1993 newsletter of the North County Bromeliad Society.

One of the favorites of the xerophytic Tillandsias, *Tillandsia tectorum*, is superbly adapted to the harsh climate of the nearly rain-free canyons of interior northern Peru and southern Ecuador. The plant uses the soft thread-like leaves to filter the minute amounts of moisture out of the air. Evaporation from rivers and occasional fogs provide most of the moisture. These plants require bright light, good air movement, and very little watering in cultivation. There are several different forms of *T. tectorum*, although Smith and Downs only lists one type. The Ecuadorian form has violet flowers and the Peruvian forms have a white flower with a violet

band at the apex. I have one that is 15 years old and it has never bloomed or pupped.

(The following is reprinted from Bromeliads by Victoria Padilla, 1973)

This species is one of the most popular of the powder puff types, for its narrow thread-like leaves covered with white feathery scales make it one of the most decorative of the atmospheric. Found growing in Ecuador and northern and central Peru at elevations of 3,000 to 8,500 feet, it forms large colonies amongst the boulders and cacti on wind-swept, hot mountainsides. It probably has been found on roofs from whence comes its name.

The plant is variable as to size, the specimens collected in certain parts of Ecuador being almost twice as large as those from Peru. The leaves may vary from 4 to 10 inches in length, forming a puff-like rosette of 6 to over 12 inches in width. The slender erect scape, from 8 to 10 inches in length, which emerges from the center, is light purplish violet bearing a densely digitate spike with bracts of the same color.

In cultivation, almost all *T. tectorum* needs is a bright sunny location. It does best when mounted, for it eschews much watering. It can thrive for years on a piece of driftwood with no attention whatsoever, except by those viewers who exclaim at its delicate beauty.

Cold Weather Protection

It is getting to be that time of year again. As we built up our collection over the year, there was plenty of room for the new plants outside, but even though we live in a milder climate, some of our plants may not do well during the winter unless protected. Some of the plants that do not handle cold winter rains are most Aechmeas (not the *recurvata* varieties), Cryptanthus, all Hechtias, the dry growing Tillandsias (like *T. tectorum*), most of the Guzmanias, and a few of the Vrieseas (such as *V. splendens*, *V. sucrei*). This list is not at all inclusive. Perhaps this month's meeting will also address some of the

more-tender bromeliads that we should protect for the winter.



Here is a habitat shot of *Tillandsia tectorum* by Wally Berg. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

The December 1997 The Bromeliadvisory newsletter from south Florida published some pointers for protecting plants for the winter that are also applicable to our climate.

1. **Keep plants warm.** This can be achieved by bringing plants indoors or providing heat where they grow.
2. **Provide cover to plants.** This prevents heat loss by convection air currents and prevents evaporative heat loss. If plants are on or in the ground, it also prevents ground heat loss and creates a warm pocket.
3. **Keep plants out of the wind when possible.** Convection air currents will lower surface and core temperatures of plants. Keeping plants close to the ground will help as well as moving plants next to buildings or other larger plants that will shield the wind.
4. **Place plants in areas where warmth is likely to be preserved.** Close placement to the ground or on the ground where conduction from the warm ground will help. Close placement to bodies of water, large trees or buildings will also help.

5. **Cover open shade structures.** This allows for the retention of warm air entrapment. This also allows the warm air to be stratified (warm air tends to rise).
6. **Sprinkle plants with caution.** This is especially effective if frost is imminent and duration of cold is brief. It is less effective if there is prolonged frost or there are cold, dry winds.

The Wonderful World of *Aechmea orlandiana*

This article by Kathy Dorr is taken from the January 1994 newsletter of the North County Bromeliad Society in southern California.

I often wonder if Mulford Foster knew how much pleasure he would give the bromeliad world when he discovered and named *Aechmea orlandiana*.

This plant has any number of varieties and sports, as well as being used in a few hybrids. I have yet to find one that wasn't outstanding in some way.

The original plant is beautifully marked and has a lovely vase shape. Then, we can go on to the darker forms which some say are sports and others say are hybrids. I have heard it said they are the result of crossing *Aechmea orlandiana* with *Aechmea Bert*. I won't say this isn't true, but I have a plant of this same cross (positive) that is stunning and it isn't dark! The plant is nearly all cream color with a peachy-pink flush-topped with black or nearly black markings.

Seedlings from *A. orlandiana* produce many variations. One particularly nice one I have seen has a wide dark stripe down the center of leaf. Some clones remain green with markings, while others will flush with shades of pink and white among the green.

Of course, there are the sports, *A. orlandiana* Ensign and *A. orlandiana v. variegata*. These would be outstanding in any plant family. They never fail to catch the eye of any attendee at a show, regardless of whether they ever saw a

bromeliad before. They are the type one could call flamboyant!

Even offsets are not always identical. Markings can be more intense on one than on another. The amount of light the plant is grown in can make a great difference also. For maximum beauty, it seems to need strong light.

All the various orlandianas will grow either terrestrially or epiphytically, so it is versatile in the landscape and will grow almost wherever you have in mind. They are also stoloniferous and take off in any direction, sometimes forgetting they are in a pot.

The 'cluster' inflorescence is yellow and orange. It is pretty, but not what I would call spectacular. Perhaps the fact that the foliage is so beautiful, it overshadows the inflorescence. One can enjoy the plant if it never flowers, but it is faithful and flowers every year.

It apparently has not been used extensively for hybridizing, as I have seen only a few plants listing *A. orlandiana* as a parent. I would think it might be a good one to 'play' with. I crossed it with *A. racinae* and the results were pleasing but not impressive. The foliage is very light green with 'shadow' markings of brown. The shape of the plant is similar to *A. orlandiana* and the main difference was really in the inflorescence. The appearance of the inflorescence was very much the same, but the berries were larger and the color seemed to be more intense. This indicated to me that some very desirable traits may be dominant.

Thank you Mulford Foster for the living memorial you left for all of us who love bromeliads. I never see one of these plants that it doesn't remind me of you and the pleasure you must have felt when you discovered it.

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 \$12. To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, and check made payable to the BSSF to: Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

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