

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



February 2009

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, February 19, 2009** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

February Program

The Nidularium Genus

Roger Lane will provide an overview of the Nidularium genus supplemented with a slide show of the species and some of the hybrids. If you have Nidulariums in your collection, bring them in for Show-and-Tell.

A little birdie told me that there will be a very large plant table this month so be sure to attend.



Here is a photo of your speaker this month. I don't think these plants are Nidulariums. Photo is courtesy of **Peter Wan**.

February Refreshments

Casper Curto, Daryl Ducharme, and Warren Warren will provide refreshments this month.



Dues are Due

A new year has begun and dues are due: **\$15 for a single membership and \$20 for a family. Pay Harold at the meeting or mail to Harold. See back page for details.**

January Meeting

Peder Samuelson regaled us with a series of photos, videos, and music on the 2006 World Bromeliad Conference in San Diego. We visited the show rooms, the top awards, the sales area, bromeliad nurseries in the area, collections of two San Diego members, plants in the San Diego Zoo, members of our society discussing their plant purchases, and a video of the plant collection of Kay and Joe Quijada. Peder zipped through these adventures rapidly – unfortunately, there was a pest in the show who kept saying WOW! Thanks for a great show Peder!

Old Wives Tales – Fact or Fiction? The Things I have Learned from My Mother

This article is taken from the December 2005 BROMELIANA, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society. It originally was written by Diane Timmons and was printed in the October 2005 issue of BROMELIAD, official journal of the New Zealand Bromeliad Society.

My parents were long time members of the Bromeliad Society of N.Z. as well as several other horticultural societies. My mother caught the bromeliad bug having won a *Neoregelia carolinae* var. *tricolor* as a raffle prize. She became a member of the rather small and select Bromeliad Society, sometime about 40 years ago. Initially there wasn't the variety of plants that we have available now, but there were an enthusiastic few who enjoyed sharing the fun of bromeliads.

The Bromeliad Society itself had members who imported bromeliads on their behalf – back in the days when it was a lot easier to do so. These plants were then offered up on the monthly trading tables in a ballot system similar to what we use now. Over the years my mother gathered a substantial number of varieties, including an extensive collection of tillandsias. As a result she accumulated a great deal of knowledge through experience. I was lucky enough to learn from this. I would like to share a few snippets with you.

I can't help but start with one on the top of my list. It is the one that caught my husband's eye as I prepared some notes for this – he wondered where burly men fitted in with bromeliads, probably more so, my mum.

BURLY MEN

As my parents both became older, their relatively steep property made it difficult to maneuver the very large potted plants. My mother looked up the local paper and contacted a man advertising as a gardener. A great help he was, moving heavy plants around, splitting large clumps, lifting potting mix and such, but it was ever so funny to see him holding large pots at arms length where possible, and with an unhappy grimace. On questioning this turned out to be a dislike for spiders. Not so tough. Then there was the other "burly man" commissioned another time on a similar quest. He offered the extended arm pose and almost the same disgusted grimace. His problem? "The water that pours out of the plant's centre – it stinks." And this one is my husband. Come on, get tough!



Neoregelia 'Perfecta Tricolor'

Entered by: Bud Martin

1998 Mothers Day Show, BSCF

This is a photo of *Neoregelia carolinae* cultivar Perfecta Tricolor by Michael Andreas and courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

FIRST PUP RULE

-courtesy of Grace Goode (well known Australian hybridist). Basically the first pup that comes from your plant will generally be the biggest and strongest. Just keep that in mind when promising a friend that they can have a pup off your wonderful new specimen. You keep the first one for yourself (at least).

IMMATURE PUPS SULK

Don't get too impatient when wanting to remove pups from the parent plant. If you take off a pup too early, and are lucky enough that it survives, then it is probably going to sulk. It will just sit there; it won't root, it won't grow and it won't do anything. This will go on for about a year, just to get you back for cutting it off too early. It can be frustrating caring for it so it doesn't rot over the winter.

LITTLE POTS vs. BIG POTS

This is for your own discretion. I know from my mother's garden that it is possible to grow a magnificent full size healthy specimen in a minute pot. My mother always used little pots. There was definitely an economy factor in regard to: cost of soil and fertilizer, cost of pot, and saving space.

However, I would only recommend this if you are a vigilant gardener. My personal experience involves plants that are exposed to extended periods of dryness, or cold, or sun – or any other environmental factor. These plants definitely survive better - grow larger and healthier when grown in a larger sized pot. There is also a wind factor. I always used to have my bromeliads in relatively small pots, and laugh at their toughness as they rolled around in a nasty storm. However, the loss of a couple of special pups soon ended that endearment. Although – keep in mind my mother's other trick – put the small pot inside a larger container. This makes a nice display and she also felt the inner pot was protected from severe sun or cold by the outer layer surrounding it.



This is a photo of *Neoregelia* Burgundy Belle by Sharon Petersen and courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

THEY KNOW IF IT'S DEAD

Mum used to come up with this as a lovely tillandsia would plop off a beautiful piece of driftwood that had been artistically chiseled by weather and tide. The plant had been leaned on, poked, glued, and tied onto the piece over several years. But the plant never gave an inkling that it might decide to attach new roots to the new home we had carefully chosen for it. Mum would always relate back to where the natural habitat of the plant would be. If they come off cliffs, attach them to rocks, and if they grow on trees, you can attach them to wood by a number of means. But the plant seems to know if the log is dead – and it knows it's not a good idea to attach to that.

WEAKLY WEEKLY

This is the rule of thumb for liquid fertilizing for your bromeliads. Do this during the growing season only, say October to December and March to May. [*In New Zealand these months correspond to our spring and fall months respectively. Their winter is in our June (in part), July and August. Ed.*]

Mum used to refrain during the hottest, driest part of the year in case lack of water might lead to the concentration of fertilizer inside the central cup. This may cause a chemical burning of the newly forming leaves, seen as brown tips of the leaves as they grow out from the center of the plant. The fertilizer my mother used was an orchid feed, diluted to one quarter of the recommended dose for orchids.

THEY HAVE A 'FRONT'

Even now, when we go through garden centers together, my mum will turn a bromeliad that is on display around. She'll say: "That's better – don't they realize bromeliads have a best side – a front and a back? Now it's smiling up at us." And I have to agree with her when she wanders through her garden admiring dramatic foliage and forms of the broms and says: "Who needs flowers when you have these lovely plants?"

Her garden is laden with bromeliads as she proclaims their ease of care, and has been developed over many years to cover virtually the entire property. This leaves almost no lawn whatsoever. She frequently comments on other properties we visit: "Look at all those lawns that have to be mowed." That always put a smile on my face – and my father's as well, I'm sure – as to this day I have never seen her on the pushing end of a lawn mower!

IT'S PUTTING ALL ITS ENERGY INTO THE FLOWER

This was always a concern when a favorite plant finally reached this state of maturity where it decides it's time to go into flower. "I hope it doesn't use up all its energy and not have enough to send up any pups" would always be the comment.

SUNBURN

Plants such as a red leaved neoregelias that are known for their sun hardiness would never show signs of stress or burning in previous decades. In more recent times there has been a visible increase in the incidence of sun damage. Mum put this down to the dreaded greenhouse (gas) that we keep hearing and wondering about.

Well, that about covers a few words of wisdom passed on from someone with a great deal of love for bromeliads and a great deal of experience in growing them. I hope there is something here that you can apply to make the pleasure of your bromeliad hobby even more rewarding. I enjoy them so much that I now work with them full time – and remember:

If you enjoy your job, you will never work a day in your life.

Billbergias – Subgenus: Helicodea

This article by Larry Giroux is extracted from the April 2006 newsletter of the Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society.

Billbergias have been around a long time in cultivation. As a matter of fact they were the first bromeliads to be introduced into cultivation in the United States. They're easy to grow and propagate rapidly. In the extreme

southern United States, left to grow on their own accord, many of the species and cultivars can be found in large beds. Many of the 70 or so species and their varieties are tolerant of the wide variety of weather conditions they're exposed to here in the South.

Named for the Swedish botanist, Gustave Billberg, many Billbergias are native to eastern Brazil, but many others, including most of the subgenus Helicodea, can be found in their natural habitat from Mexico, throughout the Caribbean and most of South America. [*Plants in this subgenus generally grow much slower than those in the subgenus Billbergia.* – Ed]

The majority of the billbergias is distinguishable by having fewer leaves than other bromeliads and is generally tall and tubular in shape. White or grayish scurf produces banding, patches or mottling on the underside or in the case of the Billbergias, the outer exposed portion of the leaf; while the upper portion of the leaf is void of scurf and is usually shiny.

Although the bloom is short lived, lasting only a few days, they have some of the showiest inflorescences of the bromeliad family. The inflorescences can be upright or pendulous as is more common with the subgenus Helicodea. A unique feature of the pendulous billbergia inflorescence is the way the large colorful bracts create an umbrella to cover the flowers composed of the stamens (the pollen bearing portion of the flower) and the pistil (the receptive portion of the flower). It can only be assumed that since the flowers of this genus are such short lived, this protective mechanism is provided to avoid the pollen from being washed off of the stamens before the pollinating agent such as an ant or other insect can carry it away to fertilize other flowers.

Another unique characteristic, especially of the subgenus Helicodea and that, which gives the subgenus its name, is the rolling back of the floral petals at the time of anthesis (the short duration of time when the pollen is most viable and the pistil is most receptive) (see photo of *B.*

zebrina). Presumably this is another mechanism provided by evolution to promote fertilization.



Photo of *Billbergia zebrina* is by Bromeliário Imperialis and courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

The photo of a blooming specimen of *Billbergia stenopetala* is by Ken Marks and demonstrates the beautiful 25 inch long inflorescence. This billbergia, which was first described by Harms in 1927 following its collection in Peru by Tessmann in 1923, shows the characteristics of the subgenus Helicodea. Besides its pendulous inflorescence with its wide bright red array of bracts, its spiraled petals, the bars of gray scurf on its leaves and its tall rosette composed of only a few leaves, there are small red bracts at the base of each flower somewhat unique to this species.

Billbergia decora was first introduced into cultivation in 1831 from the rain forest of Peru, Bolivia and Brazil. It has green petals and peach colored bracts.

On the following pages is a photographic essay of some of the billbergias of the subgenus Helicodea. I'm indebted to the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies Website for permission to use these photographs. I encourage anyone that has access to the Internet, to log on to www.fcbs.org and explore the thousands of other pictures and information available to you.



Billbergia stenopetala photo by Ken Marks

Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.



This photo of *Billbergia decora* is by Herb Plevier 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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BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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Happy New Year! Annual dues are now due!
