

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



March 2009

NEWSLETTER

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

March Program

The Terrestrial Bromeliads

Brian Kemble, Director of Horticulture at the Ruth Bancroft Garden, will be our speaker this month. Brian will provide a slide show on the terrestrial bromeliads – those stickies – that you either love or hate. Brian has been involved with The Ruth Bancroft Garden since 1980. He is highly regarded in the horticultural world and lectures in this country and in South Africa on the Agave family, Aloes, Bromeliads, the history of The Ruth Bancroft Garden and other horticultural topics. Kemble has a B.A. in Philosophy from Antioch College. His work has been in the area of horticulture since 1976, including garden design and installation, tree trimming and garden maintenance. Brian's work for The Garden has included hybridizing of aloes, agaves, and some South American cacti. Brian has traveled extensively in Mexico and South Africa, studying and photographing plants in their native habitats.

March Refreshments

Yolanda Huang signed up for refreshments this month. **Can someone else help her out this month?**



Probably most of our members know **Brian Kemble**, our speaker this month, but here is a photo for those who do not know Brian

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.

February Meeting

Roger Lane provided us with a survey of the *Nidularium* genus. Since Elton Leme has revised this genus as part of his revision of the complete Nidularioid Complex of bromeliads found in the Atlantic Forest of Brazil, slides of the *Canistropsis* genus were also included. Since our members want more information on why this new genus was created, your editor will provide an article on the *Canistropsis* genus in next month's newsletter.

The (Very) Small *Vrieseas*

This article by the late Carol Johnson is taken from the January 2004 newsletter of the Houston Bromeliad Society. Carol was very knowledgeable on bromeliads and ran the Florida nursery Pineapple Place.

The many small *Vrieseas* tend to get lost in the maze of their big glamorous relatives, but to those who have limited or very little space, or who specialize in small plants, there are real gems available. Most of the truly miniature *Vrieseas* are native to eastern Brazil and, in my experience; all self-seed and are easily grown. All seem to prefer low light but un all other ways should be treated like their bigger relatives. I list here only four, but they are my favorites of the really small plants. All are species.

- *Vriesea modesta*. To 12 inches high including inflorescence. Beautiful, simple bloom spike rising just above the recurved leaves. Spike is wider than tall, red blending to yellow-orange and rose. Very long lasting. Best grown as a clump in a six-inch bulb pan.
- *Vriesea racinae*. Eight to ten inches tall, including inflorescence. Green leaves are numerous, heavily brown-spotted and tightly recurved. Blooms and bracts are insignificant, greenish-yellow and reputed to smell like ivory soap. It is rightly the most popular of the small

Vrieseas. It self-seeds and is easily propagated. It is named for Racine Foster who discovered it in Espirito Santo, Brazil. [This species was one of the hostess plants at our Holiday Dinner. – Ed.]

- *Vriesea poenulata*. To 12 inches tall, including inflorescence. It has many thin, recurved leaves growing from a modified-bulbous base. If kept dry, the leaves develop dark speckles, which are very attractive. Flowers are yellow and fairly large for so small a plant. The plant blooms regularly and produces numerous offsets. It requires little care.
- *Vriesea correia-araujoi*. It is very similar to *V. poenulata* but without speckled foliage. The blooms are white. The leaves are more erect than recurved.

There are many other small-to-medium *Vrieseas* that are a joy to grow but all those listed below can be force-fed and be over-potted to increase their size. Grown normally, all are small enough to qualify as space savers:

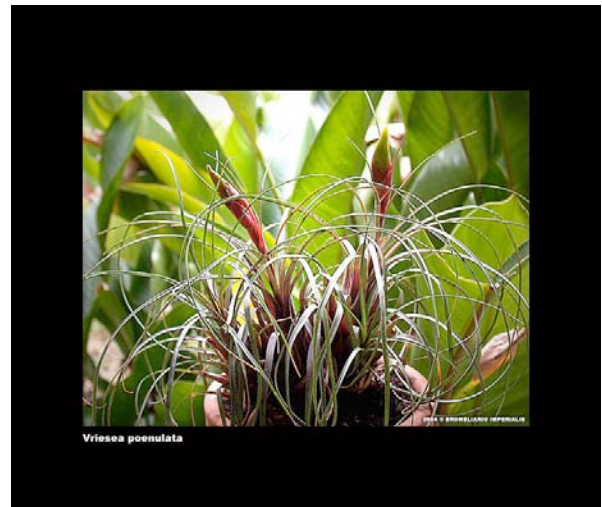
- *V. bleheri*
- *V. carinata*
- *V. flammae* (stoloniferous)
- *V. guttata*
- *V. lubbersii* (stoloniferous)
- *V. rodigasiana*
- *V. scalaris*
- *V. simplex*
- *V. sucrei*



This photo of *Vriesea modesta* by Herb Plever is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies. It truly is a “modest” bromeliad.



This photo of *Vriesea correia-araujoii* by Dorothy Berg is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.



This photo of *Vriesea poenulata* by Bromeliário Imperialis is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.



This photo of *Vriesea racinae* by Michael Andreas shows the beautiful foliage but not the cream-colored flowers. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Cultural Hints for Bromeliad Growers

This article also by the late Carol Johnson is extracted from the March 2003 newsletter of the Houston Bromeliad Society.

AECHMEA: Each species in the genus should be considered separately since the habitat covers nearly every geographic area where bromeliads are found. The Aechmeas of Brazil, Bolivia and Chile are hardier than those from Central America, the Caribbean and Amazonian South America. Some require feeding; some are hurt by application of fertilizer. Nearly all do well when mounted

provided they are started young, before the plants are heavy, but remember that mounted plants require daily care indoors. Plant sizes range from very small to very large. Plants which will ultimately be large should be weighted at potting time with rocks in the bottom of the pot. After blooming many Aechmeas produce colorful, attractive seeds, all of which are edible.

BILLBERGIA: With few exceptions this genus should be protected from freezing. Plants should be under potted and fertilized very sparingly. Overfeeding produces lush, green growth at the expense of foliage color and it may take two generations of pups before color is restored. Those from subgenus *Helicodea* are the least cold hardy. Subgenus *Billbergia* species nearly all bloom during the winter months when their blooms, though fleeting, are welcome.

ANDROLEPIS, ANANAS, ARAECOCCLUS, ORTHOPHYTUM, and xNEOPHYTUM:

These have all been lumped together since they seem to thrive on similar treatment. *Androlepis* and *Ananas* (Pineapple) are large plants. The others are more manageable in size. All require strong light, rich soil, generous pot size, regular feeding, and plenty of moisture. Most prefer warm weather and growth is slowed during winter months.

QUESNELIA, HOHENBERGIA, PORTEA, and STREPTOCALYX:

Until the switch to *Aechmea* is official, I shall continue to list *Streptocalyx* as a separate genus [*Streptocalyx* genus has been moved into the *Aechmea* genus. – Ed.] There are some big, mean plants in these four genera. *Quesnelia* is the most cold hardy, most surviving outdoors under trees in Central Florida. *Portea* is the next hardiest, while *Hohenbergia* and *Streptocalyx* are always very tender. Strong light and cessation of feeding when the plants are mature produces best foliage color and promotes blooming. Be selective growing *Hohenbergia*. Many have nothing but size to recommend them, having green foliage and colorless blooms. We list only the attractive forms.

Streptocalyx have very spiny leaves, but are extremely beautiful in bloom. Grow warm, on the dry side, and furnish lots of light.

CANISTRUM, CRYPTANTHUS, xCANMEA, and NIDULARIUM:

Here again, these take similar treatment. *Cryptanthus* are always terrestrial, but the other three can be grown mounted. All like rich soil, plenty of moisture, and should be fertilized regularly. A fairly low light level is important. *Crypts* and *xCanmea* do best in 60% shade; the rest tolerate even lower light levels. *Nidulariums* are tolerant of cold, wet conditions, and are greatly underrated. They are great as poolside specimens or under shrubbery in the yard. Because they resemble *Neoregelias*, they are often grown the same and the result is disappointing. Don't be alarmed if they drop lower leaves. That is normal for the genus. Treat *Canistrums* as *Nidularium*.

NEOREGELIA: Offsets of *Neoregelias* from the same plant, grown by two different people in different areas, can mature with very little resemblance to one another. The plants are very sensitive to light, fertilizer, and pot size and these make a world of difference in the finished plant. Most do best when under potted and underfed, grown on the dry side, and here in Florida, subjected to as much strong light as they can endure. Fifty percent shade is always safe. None do well outdoors in summer, but can pick up a lot of leaves and debris which makes them unsightly. With good growing conditions the Neos give more satisfaction with less work than many other bromeliads. Set offsets upright in an empty pot for at least 10 days to harden off before potting, but keep water in the cup. Offsets should not be taken or potted during short days.

THE PITCAIRNOIDEAE: This subfamily was the forerunner of all bromeliads, evolving in the deep past from the grass family. All (*Dyckia*, *Hechtia*, *Deuterocohnia*, *Fosterella*) are terrestrials requiring copious amounts of water and fertilizer when grown as pot specimens. Either water daily or grow standing in saucers of water. *Dyckia* is from Brazil and

very cold hardy. Hechtias are native from Texas through Central America and are extremely tender. Pitcairnia are becoming more popular, even though the foliage is often grassy and sloppy. Blooms are spectacular red, yellow, or orange. Pitcairnia habitat is damp creek banks and shady locations. They seem to enjoy a dormant, dry recess for several months during winter, which forces blooms when watering is resumed. Dyckias and Hechtias should be grown in strong sunlight and since they have enormous root systems, they need to be over potted. There are no valid bigenerics in Pitcairnioideae. [There are now recognized bigenerics in this subfamily, i.e., xDyconnia, xPitinia, xDyctia, and xHechonia - Ed.]

TILLANDSIA: Collectors visualize Tillandsias as dry growing, sun-loving epiphytes. That is the exception rather than the rule. Those with the heaviest coat of peltate (fuzzy) scales will survive dry conditions best, but this is their mechanism for extracting moisture from the air. All of the Tillandsias need moisture. In the wild, many grow on tree limbs where they are protected by the foliage, nourished by bird droppings and leaf mold. Do not treat them all the same. Research the habitat and treat accordingly. Greenhouse grown plants require applications of liquid fertilizer. Size span is ½ inch to 7 feet.

GUZMANIA: Low light, warm air, plenty of plant food, and moist pot space. Guzmanias are truly tropical plants and frustrating for many new growers. Neglect of any sort is intolerable. Feed heavily and keep in a constant stable environment. The Guzmania hybrids are easier to grow than the species and usually more spectacular. Grow outdoors at your own risk.

VRIESEA: These are the aristocrats of the Bromeliaceae. They come small and huge, with plain green or exotically patterned and colorful spineless foliage. The plants look fragile, but are probably the hardiest of all bromeliads. They have shallow root systems and should, therefore, be fed through the leaves with liquid fertilizer. Dry conditions are better tolerated than wet, but surrounding air should be moist

and cool. Some like strong light, but the general rule is 60-65% shade. Small to medium-size green leaved Vrieseas make the best showing when allowed to clump, and their bloom season is late winter.

FERTILIZER and POTTING SOIL: We add superphosphate and potash to our potting mix and top dress with slow release nitrogen fertilizer only as needed. This has improved the quality of our plants. Just recently, I have begun the practice of introducing some lime (dolomite) into the potting mix when planting bromeliads which are naturally terrestrial. This includes nearly all the Pitcairnioideae, plus Orthophytum and especially the Cryptanthus which is very dependent on the soil mix for good growth. Everyone has his/her own recipe for potting mix. Whatever works is good enough. I mix like I cook – a little of this and maybe a dash of that; then top with a little Osmocote and also cover that with some bark or sand so it doesn't wash away.

Your Favorite Bromeliads

Your editor wants each of you to make a list of your ten favorite bromeliads with a brief explanation why each one is special. This survey will continue for 2 months and then I will assemble this list into an article. You can e-mail me the list at rdodger@pacbell.net, send it via regular mail, or give it to me at one of the meetings.

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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Learn about Dyckias, Hechtias, Orthophyums, etc. this month!
