

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



October 2009

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 15, 2009** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

October Program

Photo Tour of Southern California Growers

This month's program will be a presentation of Southern California bromeliads Growers by **Tom Vincze**. During the 2006 WBC in San Diego Tom went on the tour of growers as well as visiting Kent's Bromeliads in 2007. Featured will be **Kent's Bromeliads**, **Rainforest Flora**, and the **Vrieseas of John Arden**. This month's previously scheduled program by **Peder Samuelsen** of the 2008 WBC in Australia is being postponed for a later meeting.

NOTE: Due to Recreation and Parks double booking we will be meeting in the smaller library room. Also please allow time for parking somewhere other than the parking lot because the College Graduate Fair has commandeered that as well. This unfortunate situation is being discussed in the meeting part of the agenda.

I expect we will have another superb plant table that will probably include some of the plants left over from our September sale as well as plants that our club purchased from Terrie Bert last month.



Kent's Guzmania Hybrid. Photo is courtesy of **Tom Vincze**.

October Refreshments

Marilyn Moyer and **Peder Samuelsen** signed up for refreshments this month. Can someone else help out this month?

September Meeting

Last month, **Terrie Bert** visited us from Florida and gave a very interesting presentation on the origins of the Bromeliad family. As most of you know the Brochinia genus found in Venezuela is probably the earliest of the bromeliads. What was surprising in Terrie's talk is that the Hechtia genus is also very old and these plants are only found in the United States and Central America. There are many mysteries yet to be solved in developing a complete story of the bromeliad origins. Terrie brought many plants for sale that we do not grow in the San Francisco area. It is always fun to get a speaker from another area to introduce new plants into our collections.

Aechmea fasciata... Real "Stunners" With an Interesting History

This article by Gerry Stansfield is reprinted from the March 2003 Bromeliana, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society. Gerry Stansfield is a noted hybridizer and bromeliad activist. Presently, he is Cultivar Registrar for the New Zealand Bromeliad Society and on the Editorial Staff of its journal. It originally appeared in the November 2002 issue of BROMELIAD, journal of the New Zealand Bromeliad Society.

Aechmea fasciata is naturally found on trees in the mountain forests of Southern Brazil at elevations of 1,800 to 4,000 feet and in areas around Rio de Janeiro and the Distrito Federal in Buenos Aires. It is known for its beautifully proportioned vase-like form, wide greenish leaves barred with wide silver cross bands and its typical and very striking rose to candy-floss pink inflorescence, with blue flowers. The pink spike can last for up to six months or more and so it's no surprise that this easy to grow and easy to care for plant is extremely popular with every bromeliad lover.

Our story about *Aechmea fasciata* really begins back in the 17th and early 18th centuries. In those days the botanists and collectors were often just starting to see their first bromeliads and so it is little wonder that many of the original names they gave to particular plants are not the names that have evolved and that we use today. We do know

that *Aechmea fasciata* was first introduced into cultivation in Belgium in 1826 under the name of *Billbergia rhodocyanea*, and it was one of the first bromeliads to be seen there. In some areas of Belgium is still known by the original name today.



This is the inflorescence of the standard *Aechmea fasciata*. Photo is by Graham Alderson and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

In 1826, Professor John Lindley, who was professor of botany and a diligent administrator of the Horticultural Society of London (now the Royal Horticultural Society), renamed the plant *Billbergia fasciata*. In 1830, it was called *Hohenbergia fasciata*. In 1847 the French botanist Charles Lemaire described this same plant as *Billbergia rhodocyanea*, while ten years later in 1857 the Austrian botanist Georg Boer, described it as *Hoplophytum fasciata*. Other names such as *Aechmea leopoldii*, *Aechmea rhodocyanea*, and *Quesnelia rhodocyanea* have also been recorded.

Confused? Well, our wonderful subject was finally given its permanent name of *Aechmea fasciata* by the Englishman, Gilbert Baker in 1897. Baker was a botanist of repute, well-known for his ability to correctly name many different plants.

Aechmea fasciata flowered for the first time in Kew Gardens in England in 1878. Today it is still the most widely cultivated decorative bromeliad in Europe, especially popular in Belgium. Its many horticultural forms have slightly changed its original appearance, and here we are referring to the many fine clone forms that have evolved,

such as the German 'Auslese' or 'Super Auslese' as it was usually known 'Morgana', 'Silver King', *v. purpurea* and so on.

It still rates as the number one house plant in America, as the plants are easily pollinated, providing another plant is used as the pollen parent. *A. fasciata* will not accept its own pollen but the seed is easy to grow, even though it does take nine months for the seeds to ripen. Many large nurseries around the world grow thousands of plants each year for special, very lovely improved clones that this plant has produced.

The first we have is *Aechmea fasciata* Super Auslese. This was developed by Walter Richter, the famous German horticulturist, and the seed was made available through the very large seed merchants Albert Schenkel in Hamburg. Charles Allen (now deceased) and I imported the seed into New Zealand from Schenkel. Super Auslese loosely means superior or best type, and this *fasciata* is definitely one of the best. It is a quite large plant with wide flowing leaves and strong markings and almost all over silver banding. One of the advantages of this plant is that the Germans seem to have successfully bred out the knuckling seen in many American *fasciata*s. The other point is that Super Auslese was the forerunner of the now popular Morgana, which was produced by Cornelius Bak in Holland.

A. fasciata Variegata makes a very lovely house plant while Albomarginata is one of my favourites. Then we have *v. purpurea* which makes a very attractive pot plant on your patio and it should be grown a lot more than it is. We have the lovely giant form of *purpurea* in Sangria. Down under, *Aechmea fasciata* Kiwi was raised by our own Bea Hanson from a packet of *fasciata v. purpurea* seed from the BSI seed bank back in 1980 and was registered Kiwi by Bea. The plant has consistent red-brown striping in the leaves and has a very striking appearance. There is an extremely interesting point with *A. fasciata* Kiwi, in so much as the plant is self pollinating and sets seed from which will grow back the original *A. fasciata v. purpurea*. Two others that we do not see very often are Ivory and Red Spike. The first has a pure white flower spike and Red Spike has a red spike instead of the usual pink.



Aechmea 'Kiwi'
This is the very attractive *Aechmea* Kiwi. Photo is by Derek Butcher and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Aechmeas fasciata hybrids

It is strange; to me anyway, that *fasciata* has not been used as much as one would think to produce hybrids. There are a number in the BSI registry, but not that many considering the lovely capabilities of the plant. Perhaps it is time to do something about that!

Aechmea Fascini – a cv of *A. chantinii* x *fasciata*. Williams 1969

Aechmea Pink Rocket – a cv of *A. fendleri* x *fasciata*. Nat DeLeon 1984

Aechmea Fascicaulis – a cv of *fasciata* x *nudicaulis*. Nat DeLeon 1984 (Nat DeLeon is one of the few to register favorite crosses).

Aechmea Cosmic Starburst – a cv of *fasciata* x *tessmannii*. Kent 1977

Aechmea Eileen – a cv of *fasciata* x *serrata*. Nat DeLeon, 1988. (Properly [*fasciata* x *serrata*] x *serrata*. Ed.)

...others to be found in the BSI Cultivar Registry online at www.fcbs.org or www.bsi.org.

Bromeliad Halloween

This poem is reprinted from the October 1995 issue of The Commentary, newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Broward County, Inc.

Both Witches and Goblins greet us on Halloween eve.
Even our Bromeliads in hiding, wish us to believe
That they can delight us by spectacular feats.
Whiles Tricksters and Treaters roam through the streets.

They sit by silently, then surprise us with a pup,
Much like the Tricksters "Boo" as they leap up,
Brilliant as the orange and black of All Souls night
Trying to scare us in the dark of this fateful night.

Just as we reward the children at the door,
Our plants need our help and a little bit more;
Shelter and warmth and all good things for eating,
They'll thrive most with our TLC greeting.

Give them the care and all they deserve
Help them to grow with a healthy reserve.
So next Halloween there'll be more surprises
Lots of new "pups" and no more reprises!

Growing Alcantarea Species

This article is by Theresa Bert, our speaker for last month. It is reprinted from the February 2006 newsletter of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies, Inc.

Bromeliads in the genus *Alcantarea* are native to eastern Brazil, where they grow terrestrially in open places. Most of them grow in full sun on granite outcrops (inselbergs) that can soar up to 500 feet above rivers; tropical forests and cultivated fields; in cracks where water percolates through the granite. Many of them were formerly in the genus *Vriesea*. Most are very large (3-5 feet in diameter at full size) and have brightly colored, lightly colored, or white and green inflorescences that are spectacular – up to 7-8 feet tall, with multiple branches; large, sometimes colorful

bracts; and lovely, three-petaled, yellow or white flowers with long, protruding stamens. Many have flowers with long petals that curve backward and sideways, like lovely curls at the ends. Don't hold your breath waiting for these plants to flower – they can be 10 or more years old before they flower. But it's worth the wait!

You will need space to grow these plants. *Alcantarea* species can be grown in a loose mix of potting soil, a little charcoal and Perlite. Increase pot size as they grow. They eventually become so heavy that the bases lean and press against the edge of the pot. At this time, they'll fall over when loaded with water unless some preventative measure is taken. I usually pot them in plastic pots and place those pots into heavy clay pots. Sometimes I also need to counterbalance the base of the plant by putting a brick or two in the plastic pot on the side opposite the plant base. Some species and varieties (e.g., *Alcantarea imperialis* Red) tend to rot at the base; to guard against this, grow those plants in pure Perlite and porous rock (e.g., commercially available lava rock), with lots of time-released fertilizer (avoid placing the fertilizer so that it touches the plant base). They respond well to time-released fertilizer (I use 6-month time-released Nutricote, also available as Dynamite). They also do well in the ground. If covered with light frost cloth or sheets, they survive light frosts without damage. I grow them in my yard, in full sun or partial shade, and in a shade house, sitting high above all other plants. Plant or place them in locations where you won't need to move them after they're full-grown. An *Alcantarea* holding even a little water can weigh 80-100 pounds.



Here is *Alcantarea vinicolor* that is not as large as some *Alcantareas*. Photo is by Shirley Grills-Konafal

and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

The pups on *Alcantareas* grow from the trunk. Small “grass pups” with thin leaves can appear beneath the leaves when the plant is small through full-sized. These can be removed when they’re about 4-5 inches long and potted. They are not easily removed because the base is recurved into the trunk of the parent plant. To remove them, dig the potting mix away from the plant, grasp the pup by the base, and wiggle it from side to side while simultaneously pulling the pup a bit away from the mother plant. Very robust pups frequently appear after the plant has bloomed (cut off the inflorescence) if time-released fertilizer pellets are placed between the leaves. Sometimes it’s possible to get a dozen or more pups by using this method. To remove those pups, I remove all leaves below them and use the same technique described above for the grass pups. The best way to get them to root is to insert them between the parent plant’s trunk and a big remaining leaf until they develop roots, which takes a few months. For me, that works better than potting them.

Few bromeliad enthusiasts seem to grow *Alcantarea* species, probably because they are so big. But if you want unique, interesting landscape, try plants of this genus. They can tolerate some leaf litter accumulation, but not acorns or rotting leaves left in their centers for months. Several large species available for cultivation are cold-tolerant, easy to grow and spectacular (e.g., *A. imperialis*, *A. odorata*, *A. extensa*, *A. brasiliensis*, *A. vinicolor*, and *A. heloisae*). *Alcantarea imperialis*, the most popular species, comes in several colors. The broad stiff spineless leaves are green above and green or various shades of red or purple beneath. *Alcantarea odorata* can be purchased with varying degrees of trichome (scurf) coverage. Those with thick coverings (e.g., cultivar Silver) are fuzzy or snowy-looking and interestingly beautiful.



Alcantarea odorata

photo by Reginaldo Baião

Alcantarea odorata is one of the plants that we were selling at our June sale this year. Don’t you wish you bought one? Photo is by Reginaldo Baião and courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

September Bromeliad Sale Results

Our sale last month was very successful based on the full tables Saturday morning and the nearly empty tables on Sunday. We did not have to take many plants home at the end of the sale. This was our first sale with the Orchid Society and it went very well and we got great publicity thanks to **Bruce McCoy**. Harold Charns still has to calculate our profit but it should be about the same as last year’s fall sale. Our society wishes to thank each of you for your participation.

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.

BSSF 2009 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT	Carl Carter	510-661-0568	carl.carter@ekit.com
VICE PRESIDENT	Bruce McCoy	510-835-3311	bruce.mccoy@gmail.com
SECRETARY			
TREASURER	Harold Charns	415-861-6043	Harold@States-Street.com
DIRECTORS:			
	Roger Lane	650-949-4831	rdodger@pacbell.net
	Marilyn Moyer	650-365-5560	MarilynMoyer@comcast.net
	Peder Samuelsen	650-365-5560	Pedersam@comcast.net
	Peter Wan	408-500-2103	peterkwan@earthlink.net

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY
OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Roger Lane
Newsletter Editor
551 Hawthorne Court
Los Altos, CA 94024-3121

We will see bromeliads in Australia this month!
