

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



November 2009

NEWSLETTER

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

November Program

Bromeliad Hunting in Brazil

This month our president **Carl Carter** will give a slide show based on a trip to Brazil that he and some of our society members made in June/July this year. Guillermo Rivera was our guide and he also had a bromeliad botanist on the trip to help in identifying the plants. During our trip we discovered 3-4 new bromeliad species (based on Elton Leme inspecting the collected material). Carl covered territory on this trip that no one else did – he usually was the first one off the bus at each stop and often the last one to return to the bus. Since Carl is a great photographer, expect to see some wonderful shots.



Here is **Carl** posing beside an *Alcantarea vinicolor* that was in the landscape at one of our hotels. Photo is courtesy of **Peter Wan**.

November Refreshments

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

October Meeting

Last month, Tom Vincze presented a photo tour of growers in Southern California he visited during the 2006 World Bromeliad Conference in San Diego. Since your editor was able to attend this meeting, I can not provide any more information on the meeting.

I See Bromeliads

This article by Calandra Thurrott is reprinted from the February 2008 newsletter of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

I see bromeliads everywhere I look. I see them in the background in sitcoms on TV, in the movies, and pretty much everywhere. I think I even see one when it is not there. It's usually a look-alike plant I have mistaken for one at first glance. I walked down the street in Winter Park on Park Avenue yesterday and saw a whole bed of them in front of a store (they really were bromeliads and they really were there.)

I don't usually get into the growing of them. Pretty much everything in the out-of-doors sets off my allergies. I am safer inside. They are everywhere here at the house; they are in most rooms. They hang over the TV in the living room; they are in front of the toaster (have to move them just to make a piece of toast); they stab me in the face when I sit at any table in the house. I woke this morning to one swinging right in from the bedroom window from a very strong breeze. Of course that gets me to thinking about all the bromeliads that have to be moved during a hurricane, which in turn makes me think of all the preparation for the promised cold front coming our way in the next few days.

Essentially, bromeliads have taken over our lives. I have a couple of things to blame for that. Jay, my spouse, was given some from the collection of a family friend when we were first married. I welcomed these with enthusiasm when I realized they were the only group of plants I am not allergic to. The other blame goes straight to me; I

strongly encouraged him to join a bromeliad group, Central Florida Bromeliad Society, which is an hour away. There was no local society. He was so taken with the new collection of plants. He protested that Orlando was too far to go for club meetings at that time, but decided he could benefit from the newsletters.

I have a creative streak in me. I am a weaver and a quilter. I enjoy photography and card making. Lately I have returned to knitting and taken up soldering. My first and foremost source of inspiration in these efforts is the bromeliad. If it isn't the form or the foliage, it is the colorful blooms.

The creative efforts of others are just as important to me as the plants themselves. I see enormous talent in members of the bromeliad community. I see wood burnings, photos, cards, paintings, drawings, calendars, quilts, plant arrangements, prints, kaleidoscopes, pottery, screen print shirts, embroideries, cross stitch, appliqué... I see bromeliads everywhere!

At a recent meeting of Artsetc, which was my first meeting, the art challenge for the group was presented as art work to be done was presented as art work to be done in any media with a photo as inspiration. One of the members spotted a microscopic sized bromeliad in the photo background and used that for her inspiration. Amazing! Someone else who sees bromeliads everywhere.

Do We Need All These Hybrids?

This article by George Axiotakis is reprinted from the March 2007 issue of Bromeliana, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society.

I am astounded by the human need to value man-made hybrids over natural beauty – as if anything we could make can match an *Aechmea chantinii* or *Vriesea splendens*. I have the same reaction to my fellow aquarists (goldfish with upward-facing eyes, and parrot cichlids) and herp keepers (the trend to making albino forms – which makes different species look the same!)

Now, I admit that SOME hybrids look good – and some are downright necessary for the terrarium

keeper! But over 3,000 Neoregelia hybrids? My own aesthetic objections aside, is there a sound horticultural need for all this hybridization?

In a number of plant families, (Alocasias, Anthuriums, Begonias) the hybrids are in fact often more vigorous houseplants than their parent species. Does this apply to bromeliads as well? My own reading and experience leads me to the working supposition that it does seem to apply to some Tillandsioids (soft-leaved Guzmanias and Vrieseas), but not so much to Bromelioids (the hard-leaf Aechmeas, Billbergias, Neos.) Your thoughts?



This is a photo of *Aechmea chantinii* taken by Bird Rock Tropicals. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Response by the Editor:

Years ago when we started to grow bromeliads (the BSI is only 56 years old) we had many retail nurseries who acquired their stock from collectors or by growing select plants from seed. We've seen an explosive introduction into the commercial market of bromeliad hybrid cultivars in the past few decades. These were made possible by the perfecting of tissue culture techniques by a few commercial experts which enabled them to profitably sell hundreds of thousands of clones of hybrids (made by themselves or other hybridizers) in small cell packs to wholesalers. Large wholesalers are now doing tissue culture and millions of clones are being produced. As the same time techniques for reliably forcing bloom were improved and perfected.

There is still a good market for attractive bromeliad species, but the problem is that economic factors have driven all the small retail mail-order nurseries but one out of business.

Some few species like *Aechmea fasciata*, *A. chantinii*, and *Vriesea splendens* are tissue cultured and marketed, but the overwhelming production is in tissue cultured man-made cultivars. Only now are bromeliads becoming popular as houseplants, and that is likely due to their availability at low prices in super-market chains to whom the cloned hybrids are sold. So like it or not, the development is not in our power to change; in the global economy, money is king. We are very lucky (and thankful) that the dedicated Michael Kiehl, our one remaining retail, mail-order nurseryman, still maintains a large list of species for sale.

Vigor can only be measured from offsets that are grown on over a number of generations. Without a lot of data and experience we can't safely generalize whether species or hybrids are intrinsically more vigorous. For many years I was able to grow on strong species clones that I bought from Ed Hummel in the 1960s. Vigor probably varies from plant to plant in both categories. I think George is right that the tissue-cultured hybrids are usually very vigorous. They are carefully tested for cultural problems before being mass-produced for the market. Experts like Reginald Deroose combine science and art and can intuit cultural weaknesses in a plant and reject it for production.

Winterizing – Cultural Tips

This article by Odean Head is reprinted from the November 2003 newsletter of the Houston Bromeliad Society. Even though the Texas winter climate is milder than ours, the points that Odean makes still apply to your collection..

It is that time of year again when we must take those necessary precautions to ensure that we don't suffer mass cold damage to our plant collections. Last month we talked about structures for housing our plants during the cold winter. I will try to spend a little more time on structures

and shelving details later but first I want to cover preparations for winterizing the plants.

At the very best, the growing environment for our plant collections will deteriorate during the winter. First, our light is lowered by the reduced sun we receive and the crowded conditions we experience in closed structures. The closed structure also eliminates air movement and is subjected to heat buildups on sunny days.

In organizing my collection for winterizing, I separate the plants into several groups. I want to consider their light requirements first. Since I never have enough space to accommodate all the plants that want good light I must prioritize according to desirability and stage of growth. The most important group is the special plants that will be reaching their prime in the next year or two and the clumps that have already formed. These plants will have top priority and will be placed as neat as possible into their respective best light. The newly removed pups will come next and so on until the remainder of the plants, regardless of their needs, gets put into whatever space is left over. This is when I apologize and tell them that I hope that they won't have to stay there too long. Disposition of the mothers will depend on how special the plants are, whether they have pups or not and if I desire to further propagate them. Mothers that are still attractive will be included in the display area (but not necessarily in the best light). Leaves on most of the other mothers that I keep will be trimmed so that they take up less room. Some of the mothers that have pups of sufficient size, and I have enough pups already, may be removed completely to give the pups more room.

Bromeliads need good air circulation and we should provide some additional fans for air movement during these crowded times. Placement of plants by size can help in reducing crowded conditions. We also have many warm days during the winter causing extreme heat buildups in our closed structures. We need doors and windows or panels that we can easily open and close to reduce the heat. Without some added air circulation the heat and light combinations can cause burning on the plant leaves.

Crowded conditions can also cause scale and fungus problems so be sure and check closely before placing them and treat if needed. I try to seal my structure as tight as I can using 4 or 6 mil plastic with one year UV protection. I have three large forced air, natural gas heaters and keep the thermostats set on 50 degrees. The thermostats are about 5 feet off the ground so the greenhouse does not stay that warm. In fact, the temperature can be at least 10 degrees colder on the ground so I am careful about what I leave on ground level.

Watering is more difficult when the plants are crowded but is required less frequently. How frequent will depend on the temperatures, Maybe once a week when it is warm to hot and only once every two weeks or more when temperatures are cool to cold.

I grow drier and never fertilize in the winter in an effort to prevent leggy growth. Remember also that the plants do not like to stay wet so it is best to water in the morning and give the plants a chance to dry before night.

For space utilization I like to use a combination of multiple level shelving and poles for hanging plants. Using pipe and the available clamps and fittings, you can form a network of shelves and poles that will best suit the storage needs for your plant collection. I like to use every square foot of light that comes into the storage area. I hang poles over walkways and large potted plants. If your structure is built with pipe, you can easily clamp pipes to the poles at different levels for shelves with supporting poles at the other end. If your structure is not made of pipe, you can make free standing multiple shelving units out of the pipe.

Be sure to guard against hiding prize plants. Try to keep them in view so that their needs are not overlooked. Also determine which plants in your collection are the most cold sensitive so that you can take extra precautions during extremely cold days.

Billbergias and *Billbergia nutans*

This article is extracted from the January 1997 [The Commentary](#), newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Broward County, Inc.

According to Victoria Padilla this plant is known as the “Friendship Plant.” It is indigenous to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

Billbergia nutans is a very small (about 20 cm high), tight tube made of two to three leaves up to 12 inches long which turn reddish in color if exposed to strong light conditions. The inflorescence is a nodding (pendant type) with bright pink bracts. The flowers have pink sepals and the petals are green with blue tips and edges.

Members of the genus *Billbergia* can usually be recognized by the form of the rosette, which has only a few leaves and is most often tubular (cylindrical) or at least narrowly vase-shaped. The spine-edged leaves are often spotted or banded with complex patterns of bright colors, especially the newer hybrids. Many have spectacular inflorescences but they are rarely grown for that reason because they are colorful for barely two weeks. Form and color are *Billbergias*’ claim to glory. A few of the approximately 60 species have broad funnel-form rosettes and are difficult to distinguish from *Aechmeas*. In addition to the spineless sepals, nearly all *billbergias* have pendant inflorescences and the long strap-shaped petals are often recurved or coiled. They are a great plant for beginners as they are easiest bromeliad to grow. They look their best when viewed from below with light shining through the leaves which makes them particularly beautiful. *Billbergias* need high light to develop good color and form. They will tolerate temperature extremes. They may be mounted as well as potted and pup readily on short stolons.

December Holiday Party

Save December 17th for our annual holiday party. The club will provide honey baked ham, turkey,



Vriesea splendens var *splendens*
photo by M Asmuss

Here is *Vriesea splendens* that is mentioned as example of a species better than some of its hybrids.. Photo is by Matthias Asmuss and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.



This is the Friendship Plant (*Billbergia nutans*) in flower. Photo is by Michael Andreas and is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

and a free plant for each member. You will provide beverages, vegetable dish, salad, or dessert. We always have great time at this meeting. There will be a sign-up sheet at the meeting this month and we will follow up with you if you can not make this meeting.

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

The Journal is published bimonthly at Orlando, Florida by the Bromeliad Society International. Subscription price (in U.S. \$) is included in the 12-month membership dues: single (\$28.), dual (2 members at one address receiving one Journal -\$30). Address all membership and subscription correspondence to: Membership Secretary, Dan Kinard, 6901 Kellyn Lane, Vista, CA 92084, USA, membership@bsi.org

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We are visiting Brazil this month!
