

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



June 2012

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, June 21, 2012** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

June Program

Focusing on the Broms of Oaxaca and Chiapas

Andy Siekkinen was trained as chemist but loves plants—especially bromeliads. Hoping to return to school to obtain an advanced degree in the study of the genus *Hechtia*, he has been exploring much of Mexico in search of these poorly studied plants. Already discovering some new species, he is always on the lookout for more overlooked gems. With his experience travelling south of the border he has started a tour company leading botanical and cultural tours of Mexico. Currently he is organizing a tour based in Puerto Vallarta over Thanksgiving week and a trip to Oaxaca in January.

This month, Andy has put together a show on some of the plants that he saw in his recent trip to Oaxaca and Chiapas.

June Refreshments

Roger Lane and **Gus Samaniego** signed up for refreshments this month.



Here is **Andy** in Mexico checking out *Hechtia myriantha*. Photo is courtesy of Andy Siekkinen.

Plants for Sale

At this month's meeting, our society will be selling some of the leftover plants from the sale at prices just above wholesale. Some of these plants will also be on our plant raffle table.

May Meeting

Last month we had a large turnout for **Guillermo Rivera** who provided a show on Brazil that is a composite of the tours he has led to the states of Bahia and Minas Gerais. The bromeliad varieties found in Brazil is amazing and when your editor was on one of these trips, he was convinced that many of the plants were new species – not true. But three new bromeliad species have been discovered on Guillermo's trips to Brazil. Guillermo said that the economy in Brazil is so strong right now, that he is hesitant to schedule more tours at this time because the costs would be prohibitive.

June Plant Sale

Our combined plant sale with the San Francisco Succulent and Cactus Society (SFSCS) on June 9th and 10th was a great success. I do not know what our profit is because we must share in the expenses. The variety of plants that were available is probably greater than at any of our sales. The plants that our society purchased from various nurseries were diverse and colorful – plants for the collector and for the general public. We had a profusion of landscape plants from **David Feix**. **Harold Charns** brought in some of the largest *Aechmea recurvata* clones ever. Our members purchased most of these, so the general public did not have as many from which to select. If you wanted a bromeliad tee shirt, **Dan Arcos** had many colors and sizes to choose from. **Wes Schilling** brought his custom pot hangers and related CD for constructing mounts for the hangers.

Special thanks goes to **Ted Kipping** who brought in some of the most colorful *Tillandsia somnians* clones I have ever seen and donated them to our society to sell.

One item that did not sell as well as usual was the *Tillandsia cyanea* plants in spike. None had an open flower which is a help in selling, so we provided pictures of the plant in flower and reduced the price considerably.

We had great success with the glass globes filled with tillandsias at the Pacific Orchid Exposition. They were not popular at this sale. Perhaps they are not in vogue anymore.

Thanks must go to all of our members who helped to make this sale such a success. Some of you potted and priced plants; others labeled and priced tillandsias; many of you helped set up on Friday and worked hard all weekend; many participated in our plant display with colorful bromeliads. Thanks again to all of you!

The Wonderful World of *Aechmea orlandiana*

This article by Kathy Dorr is reprinted from the January 1994 newsletter of the North County Bromeliad Society. Your editor includes this article because we had many of colorful varieties of this plant at our sale and they were snapped up.

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.



Here is *Aechmea orlandiana* cv. Rainbow – much more colorful than the standard form.

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

Of course, there are the sports: *Aechmea orlandiana* Ensign and *Aechmea 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.



This is an example of the standard *Aechmea orlandiana* grown in really bright light. Photo is courtesy of Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

It apparently has not been used extensively for hybridizing, as I have seen only a few plants listing *Aechmea orlandiana* as a parent. I would think it might be a good one to play with. I crossed it with *Aechmea 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 *Aechmea 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.

Not only are the various orlandianas easy to grow, but they are also hardy. I grow them outside [Kathy lived in the Los Angeles area – Ed.] under shade cloth the year round. Some were damaged in the winter with very low temperatures, but none died. All came back in full grandeur – perhaps a little 'chopped' looking where I cut off the damage, but still eye catching.

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 don't remind me of you and the pleasure you must have felt when you discovered it.

Spiky Business

This article by Andrew Steens is reprinted from the December 2007 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of Greater Chicago.

The hazards of collecting bromeliads in their native habitat are fairly well known. Snake bites, scorpion stings, army ants, swollen rivers, malarial mosquitoes, angry natives, and perilous mountain trails are just some of them. Compared to all this, life as a bromeliad collector and nurseryman in relatively hazard-free New Zealand can seem a little tame.

However, from time to time, bromeliads have a way of reminding you of just how they defend themselves. One incident that I recall well happened some years ago when I was busily buying in stock to speed up the establishment of my nursery. A nursery in Auckland was selling off stock cheaply as the original owner had gone broke. Knowing that there was fairly limited time before other bromeliad aficionados found out about this, every week I was trying to buy one or two vanloads to take back to Pt Wells, about one hour north of Auckland. It was important each

trip to make every effort to cram as many broms into my van as possible.

On one of these trips, I was able to buy some large but poorly grown *Bromelia balansae* (at that time quite a rare plant) along with some large clumps of *Aechmea disticantha*, which I already had, but couldn't resist getting more of.

These went into the van along with lots of miniature neoregelias. Inevitably, once the van was packed I found some more 'must haves' that were also squeezed in somehow. The van had a sliding door on one side, so I leaned over the *Bromelia balansae* and used one hand to support myself against the other side while my free hand was used to shift plants around. When I tried to get back out though, I found that my center of gravity was too far over, and the only way to do it was to push hard against the wall and fling myself back. Eyeing the spiky leaves below me must have made me nervous and guess what...I didn't push hard enough!

Ouch! That's when I suddenly realized why *Bromelia balansae* has some spikes that curve forward, some backward and some straight out. My arms were shredded on the way in, shredded more as I thrashed about to regain my balance, and shredded yet further as I ripped myself back out.



This photo of *Bromelia balansae* does not show how vicious their leaves really are. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Blood streamed from multiple gouges as I launched myself backwards as quickly as I could to avoid this man-eating plant only to be brought up sharply as pain lanced through my derriere.

Murphy's Law had firmly established itself and several extremely sharp leaf tip spines of *Aechmea disticantha* had now lodged themselves about 1 cm deep into my nether regions. Cursing

none too softly and with considerable imagination, the remaining plants were hurled unceremoniously into the van and I retreated bloody and considerably wiser from the scene.

One Hundred Years Ago

This article by Mulford Foster from the Bromeliad Society Bulletin, November-December, 1960 is reprinted from the newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of San Diego. Given the date of the original article, this title should be One Hundred Nineteen Years. It shows the effects of inflation over the years.

Through the generosity of Morris Hobbs, I have received a splendid gem out of the past. It is a catalogue by Messrs. Pike and Ellsworth of "Rare Florida Flowers", season of 1893, from Jessamine Gardens, Jessamine, Pasco County, Florida.

It is unusual for its quality, containing many old wood cuts of plants and two full color plates. It offers a variety of plants for exceptionally low prices, including the following bromeliads.

"Air Plants or Tillandsias", as they say, are offered on half a page illustrated by the accompanying wood cut of *Tillandsia fasciculata* (which was misnamed then as *Tillandsia bracteata*). "Price 15c each, extra fine large plants 25c each".

Again we quote: "Although those do not belong to the Orchid Family, still they grow in just the same manner and make companion plants, so we offer them here. They can be grown in wire baskets of moss, or be wired on a block or forked limb, and hung by chords. All they need is a good wetting and a little water poured into them occasionally. They make up the most unique ornamental imaginable, and never fail to excite the curiosity of all beholders. They also do finely in a north window, where few plants will thrive."

"*Tillandsia utriculata* – fine plants, 15c each; extra large and fine, 25c each."

"Spanish Moss: the long graceful silvery-gray festoons of this beautiful Air Plant, *Tillandsia usneoides*, erroneously called a moss, hang like long streamers from the limbs of trees, producing an indescribably beautiful effect as it waves back and forth in every passing breeze. In the north, it can be used with the most charming effect for draping over picture frames and rustic work, in drawing rooms and for decorating Christmas trees and booths at church fairs, etc. It remains fresh and beautiful for months, and if occasionally

taken down and thoroughly wet will remain fresh and growing for an indefinite period. The longest and most perfect strands, 20c per pound.”

All of this and more in 1893. Who says bromeliads have just recently become popular?

Tillandsia bulbosa is growing in an ageotropic form. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Ageotropic

This article by Ken Quinn is reprinted from the January 2003 newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of New Orleans.

At the November meeting I showed how I mounted some tillandsias such as *Tillandsia pseudobaileyi* upside down, and used the word in the title to describe how they grow in nature – a word that means they grow without regard to the direction of gravity. Paul Isley, in his book on this genus, describes several species as growing in this manner; in particular *Tillandsia bulbosa* and *T. magnusiana*, and remarks that in cultivation growing them in a horizontal or upside down fashion can be beneficial by preventing rot. Certainly, I have found this to be the case; previously I had trouble getting *T. bulbosa* to survive even a year but now I have a clump of second generation plants coming into bloom. I suspect any of the pseudo bulb or dry-growing species would like this treatment.

When in Florida, I noticed something related. Nearly all the *Tillandsia bartramii*, *T. simulata*, and *T. fasciculata* plants growing on horizontal tree limbs were rooted on the bottom half of the limb, although the mature rosette faced upward. This indicates to me that something discourages seedlings from becoming established on the upper half of the limb. I have thought quite a bit on this and suspect that the drying effect of direct sunlight may be the problem. I have also seen an article in a botanical journal on *Tillandsia recurvata* on oak limbs in Florida; about 87% of all colonies on horizontal limbs were on the side or bottom. So – being upside down is no problem for many tillandsias!



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 Charms, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

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Let's go to Mexico with Andy Siekkinen this month!