

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF

SAN FRANCISCO

DECEMBER 2014



Meeting Specifics

When: Thursday, December 18

Time: 07:00 PM

Recreation Room

Where: San Francisco County Fair
Building
9th Avenue at Lincoln Way
San Francisco

Note that we are meeting earlier this month for the holiday party.



Holiday Potluck and Gift Exchange

This month culminates another year for our society. For our members that are not able to get to our monthly meetings, we hope that many of you will be able to join us for the holiday potluck. This month's meeting will be an opportunity for us to socialize and partake of great food. The society is providing an organic turkey and organic ham. We are asking you to bring a dish to share- drinks, appetizer, vegetable dish, rolls, desserts, etc. Please try to remember to bring serving silverware for the dish that you bring. We will provide plates, cups, silverware, and napkins. Dan Arcos is coordinating the food items. Please email Dan at darcos@pacbell.net or call Dan (415-823-9661) to see where you can fill in some of our gaps. **Please do not bring any alcoholic beverages for the party!** The current food item list is available at <http://sfbromeliad.org/>.

Our club will provide a plant for each member. You may also bring a special plant or plant-related item for exchange with the other members (not required).



Acanthostachys strobilacea, Edmundoa ambigua, Quesnelia arvensis



November Meeting

Terrie Bert showed examples of many of the unusual genera that we could grow, but don't

Last month, Terrie Bert gave us a slide show that summarized the 45 bromeliad genera that we can grow in the United States. Her introductory slides summarized the genera that we all grow, such as aechmeas, billbergias, neoregelias, and vrieseas. As she went into her description of those genera that we don't usually grow, there were

many examples of genera that we grow in the Bay area but may not be grown in other parts of the country, such as hechtias and dyckias. One genus she mentioned was Nidularium that Harold Charns grows but most of our members do not grow. Each slide about a genus showed where the plants are found, conditions they require, and some representatives of the genus. Because she had so many

genera to cover, the show was long but she covered the material rapidly and concisely.

She broke up the show with some wonderful shots of Iguaçu Falls where some dyckias grow that are submerged in water for portions of the year.

Many of the genera she covered are interesting and might be fun

A *Navia* species endemic to the tepuis of Venezuela

To grow, but they are probably not available from commercial nurseries, such as Navias.

As usual when Terrie visits us, she brings a large diversity of plants that are very reasonably priced. It was hard to get into the tables to even inspect her offerings. The few

leftover plants were purchased by our society for future raffles.

Many thanks to Gary Turner for providing a projector and to Carl Carter for obtaining raffle tickets. Our society projector and raffle tickets were unavailable in time for



the meeting.

Boost Your Humidity

This article by Herb Plevier is reprinted from the February 2005 BROMELIANA, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society. Although our winters are mild compared to those in New York, if you grow your plants indoors, the plants do get much less humidity indoors during the winter.



Alcantarea regina



Araecoccus flagellifolius



Billbergia Estrella

Photos are courtesy of the BSI and Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies

When we are subjected to prolonged frigid temperatures as has occurred in the past few winters, I become very conscious about the drop in humidity in my apartment. The above title and this article are taken from the January 2000 BROMELIANA; I think they are pertinent and warrant repetition.

Bromeliads are found growing in a range from southern United States through Central and South America. Besides the Hechtias and Puyas that are often found in dry desert-like areas, the rest of the genera grow in high humidity, whether it is at the seashore, the Amazon basin or in the rain and cloud forests. The cloud forests may be at very high altitudes where it can get cold, but the plants growing there are bathed in the moisture of thick clouds which roll in about 3 P.M. and do not dissipate until they are burned off by the sun the next day.

It is axiomatic that without such special cloud conditions, cold air cannot hold much moisture. Bromeliad growers in the South don't have the problem of too little humidity - sometimes, perhaps they get too much for themselves as well as their plants. But in the northern climes, indoor growers face the problem of living in very dry air when the cold weather sets in.

This condition is exacerbated when you have to heat your homes or apartments to stay comfortable in the winter. The heat further reduces what little relative humidity

you get from your plant trays and bromeliad reservoirs. Your usually adaptable plants become unhappy in the dry air, and so do your nasal tissues and your pianos. The glue in the joints of your furniture dries and you may find the legs of your tables and chairs have loosened.

If your home remains heated and dry, you will find that this condition has also promoted the growth of mites and mealy bugs. When it is really cold outside, the air may hold only 10% to 15% relative humidity and the heated air inside your apartment or home may hold even less than that. It therefore behooves you to take at least some steps to boost the relative humidity in your home. I try to keep my rooms at between 50% to 65% relative humidity. Even if you can't reach these levels, it will help if you use as many of the following devices as you and your budget can manage:

1. Keep your heating at the lowest level you can maintain without being uncomfortable. It is better to put on a sweater if you feel cold than to raise the heat.
2. Fill the cups of your bromeliads as frequently as is convenient. These reservoirs of water will constantly evaporate moisture into your rooms, especially if they are hot.

2. The use of pebble trays will also add to the relative humidity.
3. The most effective way to maintain good humidity is to use cold water humidifiers. If you can afford it, run one in each plant room and in your bedroom. I used to use a big console humidifier with a 10-gallon reservoir. It had a big rotating drum with a foam pad on the circumference which dipped into the water reservoir and stayed wet. A motorized fan blew moisture off the pad into the room. It was a very effective device with several drawbacks. It required filling a small pail 3 or 4 times, carrying it from the sink to the humidifier. The reservoir and the foam pad got gunky very fast, with algae and with brown fungus, slimes and molds, and the required constant cleaning was a major job. I also feared the possibility of Legionnaire's disease from the large standing reservoir of dirty water.

The hard work and fears caused me to abandon the humidifier, and I relied just on trays of water and bromeliad reservoirs for humidity. But that is when I started having trouble with mites, so I resumed the use of humidifiers, this time with a number of small 3 gallon cold water appliances which worked the same way as the large console I had abandoned. The reservoirs quickly collect slimes, molds, etc. and have to be cleaned often. Even more burdensome is the fact that the filters had to be replaced often, and their considerable expense offsets the relatively low cost of the units.

Last year I tested the new Venta Airwashers that both humidify and clean the air. I bought rebuilt 2-gallon units which can blow all of the water into a large room in 1 to 2 days depending on the setting of the 3-speed fan. They do not require any filters, and are designed so that the water in the reservoir acts as a filter. The units are light and the reservoir and its rotating device can easily be carried to the sink every 10 to 14 days to clean them out. The fan is very quiet (almost inaudible at low speed) so you can keep the unit operating without disturbing your sleep.

Even during the recent cold wave when the temperatures dipped to 12 degrees F, I managed to keep my apartment at 50% relative humidity. With more normal winter weather the humidifiers keep my apartment between 55% to 65% humidity.

The downside to these units is that the initial cost is high - \$200 for the rebuilt units, but they come with a ten year full warranty.

How can you tell the relative humidity in your apartment? I use a combination temperature and humidity gauge which is quite accurate. You can get one for \$12 to \$20 at the same stores that sell humidifiers, or on the internet.

Rather than carrying the units to the sink to fill them as I did with my previous Holmes humidifiers, I fill them with a 2 gallon watering can. I have gotten into a routine of filling and cleaning the humidifiers and I find that it really takes very little time to maintain them. Given the humidity they need, my plants have lush, vibrant leaves, grow fast, and flower easily; they justify the small sacrifice of time and money for the humidifiers.

Even if you are not ready to undertake the cost of these Venta humidifiers, you still have the option to buy a 3 or 4 gallon, filter type, cold water humidifier which should cost no more than \$30 to \$40 dollars. (The filters will cost \$10 to \$12 each; they get gunky quickly and will need to be replaced every 1 to 2 months.)

Alternatively, use more pebble trays and fill the cups of your plants with water more often so that there is constant evaporation of the water to create humidity. It goes without saying that you will have to soak your mounted tillandsias more frequently (every 7 to 10 days) when the humidity in your home is low.

Need for Display Plants

One of our society members, **Casper Curto**, is responsible for designing and constructing the entry display at the upcoming Pacific Orchid Exposition to be held from 19 through 22 February 2015. He will be incorporating bromeliads into the display. Our society is helping him with most of the tillandsias. However, he wishes to incorporate additional bromeliads that some of our society members may grow. He wants

- Colorful *Tillandsia somnians*
- Large Neoregelias

If any of our members have these plants and could loan them to Casper for the display, please contact Casper to work out the details. Thank you for helping.

Casper Curto (510) 562-9676

A Few Notes on Fertilizing

This article by Herb Plever is reprinted from the February 2005 BROMELIANA, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society.

At the January meeting, questions were raised about the use of fertilizer: Should it be uniformly applied to all genera? At what strength(s) and when should you use it? This is a very complicated subject and the space here will permit only a few clarifications.

First, be advised that there are many, many opinions by expert growers on fertilizing and fertilizers, and they are often in conflict. What may work well for one grower may not be good for your conditions. As in all horticultural issues, you must find answers by trial and error under your particular environment. I have devised a regimen after much experimentation that works for my apartment, and I am still constantly changing it as I observe the effects on my plants. Keep in mind that my apartment receives good, unobstructed light, so I can get away with stronger proportions of fertilizer than you might.

- I don't fertilize neoregelias at all and I concentrate on giving them maximum light. I only grow neos that I have found by trial and error can color up in my windows or close to my six-tube fluorescent fixture. If you foliar spray neoregelias, their color and markings will usually fade.
- I don't often fertilize Billbergias. I may give a low strength feeding once in the spring and summer. Billbergias will also lose color and markings if sprayed with fertilizer.
- Every 2 to 3 weeks in the spring and summer (3 or 4 weeks in the fall and winter) I heavily fertilize vrieseas and Guzmanias (1 tsp. per gallon water), but I thoroughly flush the fertilizer out of the leaf axils with fresh water later in the same day or the next morning. If you don't do this you will find that the leaf margins have burned (especially at the sheaths) due to the high concentration of fertilizer. The plants take up most of the fertilizer they are going to use within the first hour of application. After about a half a day, some

fertilizer will remain in the water. When the water evaporates, the plant is left with fertilizer salts which will burn the leaves.

- **Even better** than that regimen is to cut the strength of the fertilizer in half and apply it every week (every 2 to 3 weeks in the fall and winter). Now that I am retired, I plan to test this method; it is more work but it reduces the problem of leaf burn.
- I use the same regimen for most Aechmeas. But I only use slow release pellets on *Quesnelia* Tim Plowman because I suspect the leaf tips curl better when they grow more slowly. For Pitcairnia, I pour the fertilizer into the mix and I also use slow release pellets. For Orthophytums and Cryptanthus, I foliar spray their leaves and use slow release pellets.
- I have made available an all-purpose fertilizer as well as different fertilizer formulas for different genera. Members will do well just using Peat Light Special (20-10-20) or the all-purpose fertilizer (20-17-37) of Epiphytes Delight (20-10-30).



This is *Orthophytum* Brittle Star, one of Lisa Vinzant's wonderful hybrids.

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 sfbromeliad.org 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 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 Bromeliad Society International publishes the Journal bimonthly at Orlando, Florida. Subscription price (in U.S. \$) is included in the 12-month membership dues. Please address all membership and subscription correspondence to Membership Secretary Annette Dominquez, 8117 Shenandoah Dr., Austin, TX 78753-5734, U.S.A. or go to www.bsi.org.

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