BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF

SAN FRANCISCO

OCTOBER 2015

Meeting Specifics

When: Thursday, October 15

Time: 7:30 PM

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

Travels to the Bolivian Highlands

This month, our very own president, **Carl Carter**, will be the speaker. Several years ago he made a trip to Bolivia with Guillermo Rivera's tour company. Guillermo has spoken to us on many of his tours, but never on Bolivia.

Carl's talk with focus on the Altiplano (high plain) that is the most extensive area of high plateau on earth outside of Tibet. Average heights are over 12,000 feet. Although Bolivia boasts over 17,000 species of seed plants, this tour to the highlands focused on the Rebutia/Sulcorebutia cacti species and bromeliads. Among the plants we will see in his slide show are small puyas (a common bromeliad found at the higher altitudes) and the miniature tillandsias that form a group called Diaphoranthema. Examples of tillandsias in this group are *Tillandsia caliginosa*, *T. myosura*, and *T. recurvata*. Let's have a great turnout for a slide show on plants and scenery that we almost never see.

Marilyn Moyer and Peder Samuelsen signed up for refreshments this month. Any additional contributions are always appreciated.

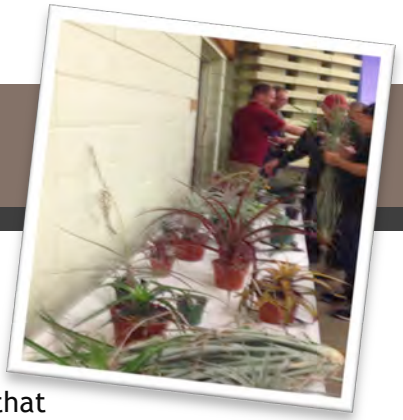
Orthophytum disjuntum and *Aechmea leptantha*

September Meeting

Last month, Andy Siekkinen summarized his research reported at the first World Congress on the Bromeliad Family Evolution

Last month, Andy Siekkinen gave us a talk on his visit to Brazil this March. The purpose of his trip was to report on his genetic research on the genus Hechtia. He was at the first World Conference on Bromeliaceae Evolution, dubbed BromEvo. Although he was disappointed that none of the bromeliad taxonomists attended (Bruce Holst, Walter Till, Elton Leme, etc.), this environment did provide an opportunity for those in attendance an understanding of the current status of research and question for additional research. Among Andy's slides it was interesting to learn how much the work on describing Hechtias has increased in recent years. Following the publication of the 3 volume monograph on bromeliads, very little was done. Fortunately, a number of younger people are tackling this sticky problem.

Following the conference Andy visited areas close to the conference location in northeastern Brazil to see plants in habitat. They started along the ocean where the various types of *Tillandsia palacea* are prolific. Venturing to the interior, Andy showed the great diversity of various clones of *Orthophytum disjunctum*, unidentified Hohenbergia species, and many different clones of *Aechmea leptantha* – most of these growing on granite formations. This is not unusual since so much of the land has been converted for agricultural needs and most plants retreat to areas where there is no agriculture.



Andy brought lots of plants to sell – both stickies and others

Andy brought many plants to sell so many of our members went home with new bromeliad treasures. Some that he did not sell may show up on the plant raffle.

From top to bottom: *Neoregelia, Quesnelia arvensis,* and *Alcantarea vinicolor*

Growing Tips for Beginners

For our recent 2011 Fiesta Show and Sale in Auckland the committee prepared an information flyer for those 'new to broms', outlining basic cultivation for the common genera, information about Society and an invitation to attend a Society meeting for a free practical demonstration on 'Growing Bromeliads'. We had fifteen people come along to the meeting, with all attendees learning something, and with most subsequently joining the Society.

I thought it would be useful to publish this cultivation information in the Bromeliad Journal in three parts. I've expanded a little on the beginner's growing tips presented at the meeting demonstration.

Getting to know your new bromeliads

The first step to growing great bromeliads is to identify what type (genus) of bromeliad you have, as some require specific treatment and position in the garden or greenhouse to flourish and look their best. Below are some groups of the common genera available in New Zealand and what conditions they generally like.

NOTE: This is a general, so if possible always ask the seller or an experienced Bromeliad Society member what conditions your specific plant liked and stick to them, as there are some variations to these rules for specific plants. It's also good to research online.

Neoregelia/Aechmea/Billbergia/Quesnelia/Wittrockia/Portea

- Thick, stiff, spiny, darker or deep red colored leaves – generally will handle very bright light/minimal shade to full sun
- Soft, thin leaves, small/no spines – generally requires dappled. semi shade, protection from midday summer sun.
- Free draining mix, very minimal or no fertilizer for best color; keep center cup and leaves and soil well watered in warmer months, drier in colder months. Many types are frost hardy, though overhead protection is advised to prevent marking.
- Generally like bright light, much better suited to outdoors than indoors. Most types suitable for epiphytic tree mounting.

Vriesea/Alcantarea/Tillandsia

(Green Leaf Forms)

- Stiff or plain green/grey/dark red coloring to leaves – generally will handle very bright light/minimal shade to full sun
- Patterned leaves – generally requires dappled shade, protection from midday summer sun.

- Free draining mix, fertilize in warmer months for larger size, keep center cup and leaves and soil well watered in warmer months, drier in colder months. Keep roots moist, not dry or soaking wet (cause of browning lower leaves and leaf tips).
- Generally like bright light, better suited to outdoors than indoors. Vriesea and Tillandsia suitable for epiphytic tree mounting if desired. Alcantarea best planted in the ground or on/around rocks. All must have frost protection.

(Tillandsia – Gray Leaf Forms – Air Plants)

- Do not plant in soil – should be glued to driftwood/cork/trees/rocks/hanging baskets, etc. (not tantalized fences).
- Many do not require any specific watering/fertilizing to grow – good air movement, rain and humidity is enough. However, some are sensitive to cold and DO require regular spray misting and/or feeding. Information from the seller and research is advised for all varieties. Most types are suitable for both indoors and outdoors.

Nidularium/Guzmania/Cryptanthus

- Soft, thin leaves, small/no spines – requires dappled/semi or full shade and protection from direct summer sun.
- Free draining mix, fertilize in warmer months for larger size, keep cup and leaves and soil well watered in warmer months, drier in colder months. Keep roots moist, not dry or soaking wet (cause of browning lower leaves and leaf tips).
- Suitable for both indoors and outdoors. Generally not recommended for epiphytic tree mounting.

Dyckia/Orthophytum/Puya

- Stiff, spiky leaves, most will handle full sun and frost.
- Like very free draining mix and large pots. Fertilize in warmer months for larger size and keep soil well watered in warmer months, drier in colder months. Keep roots moist, not dry or soaking wet (cause of browning lower leaves and leaf tips).
- Must have very bright/direct light for best color, better suited to outdoors than indoors.

Basics of Getting Started in the Garden or Greenhouse

1. **Acclimatization and Light**

While most bromeliads are often extremely adaptable, a common mistake that is often made is to bring home a plant or cut off a pup and put it straight into an environment it is not used to. This often causes the plant to go into shock, fade/burn/elongate its leaves, or flower prematurely, regardless of whether it is a young pup or a

From top to bottom: *Tillandsia bulbosa, Nidularium innocentii Stiatum,* and *Orthophytum gurkenii*

mature specimen.

Always try to find out what conditions it was growing under before you got it. A brom taken from a warm, sheltered greenhouse will normally not survive very well if planted immediately into a cld, wet and windy garden…a bit like us really! If you wish to have it positioned in a much sunnier or windier spot, make sure you acclimatize it slowly over a few months by giving it gradually more outdoor time/sun/wind before planting. However, any pups that emerge from the mother plant in the new environment will normally be able to handle the new conditions much better than mum did = remember they are quite adaptable!

Finding the correct high light levels for each of your bromeliads in order for them to look their best cannot be over emphasized. This is often a trial and error process that may take months or even years, depending on your growing environment. A general rule to remember: more light = more warmth – better color and better form. Most broms love warmth and humidity, so experiment positioning them in places where they can handle as much light and sun as they can take, without scorching or bleaching the leaves and drying out. Conversely, placing most broms in full shade areas will often cause the plant to lose any red/orange/yellow colors or patterning, reverting to longer strappy leaves that often look nothing like what it's supposed to look like. This can be very disappointing (especially after paying good money for a special plant), so use shade with as much caution as planting in sunny areas. Remember: Learn your plant's specific growing requirements before you start.

2. Growing Media

Almost all bromeliads like a very free draining, or 'loose' growing media. Do not plant them in clay or heavy/waterlogged top=soils, as they are likely to suffer and rot at the base. Any fine bark or pumice based potting mix is ideal to use – often sold in 40-liter bags from garden centers. The key is to ensure any bagged mix does NOT contain high levels of nitrogen slow release fertilizer, as this can cause the plants to grow excessively soft and strappy. However, a small amount of 3-6 month slow release fertilizer in potting mix is normally fine for most broms and will give pups a good start.

A good tip to make your potting mix to go further is to add other media such as 30% to 50% of the volume in pumice sand, peat, coarse river sand, coarse gravel, scoria, larger bark chips, and broken pieces or balls of polystyrene.

Broms are not fussy about what you use and remember, no one can see inside your pots! The ratios of media in your mix can vary – there are not set rules = as long as they help make the mix porous, allowing sharp drainage, reasonable airflow and drying ability around the roots.

3. Planting and Potting

Most bromeliads do not need roots to be formed when they are planted. They will develop good roots over time if the mix is free draining, they are watered, and are not knocked around or stressed.

GARDEN PLANTING – Dig a 5-6 inch wide and deep hole for smaller plants and 6-0 inches for larger plants. If the soil is heavy clay, etc, use a steel rod or garden fork to make a few 4-6 inch deep drain holes in the bottom of the hole. This will aid draining water away from the base of the plant after heavy rain/excessive watering. Fill ¾ of the hole with your free draining potting mix (as explained above), insert the plant into the mix and press the mix firmly – not tightly – around the plant on all sides. Take care to ensure the plant is NOY positioned too deeply, as excess moisture and pressure cause basal rot. Fill the rest of the hole around the plant and use larger bark pieces, pebbles or small stakes if necessary to keep the plant stable in any wind, etc. Alternatively, a good tip is the whole pot the plant is in can either be partially or fully buried in the ground. This allows easy removal and repositioning at a later date, if desired.

This is part 1 of an article written by Graeme Barclay of the Bromeliad Society of New Zealand. Although written for growers in the southern hemisphere, the tips also apply to growers in the San Francisco area. Part 2 will be in next month's newsletter

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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