

BROMELIANA

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RAISE YOUR HUMIDITY

by Herb Plever

In the past month we have been hit with a sustained cold spell; the highest daily temperatures have mostly stayed below freezing - often in the 20°s and teens and the lowest temperature as low as 5°. Since cold air cannot hold much moisture, the relative humidity in my apartment has hovered at about 30%. I've been running my one gallon humidifier at full blast which gets the humidity up between 35% and 40%, but it needs to be refilled every 1-1/2 to 2 days. Winter humidity is always a problem for plant growers whether in a house or apartment. I wrote about this problem in Bromeliana as far back as the February, 1975 issue which is reproduced below.



My annual warning about the deleterious effects of an overheated, arid home environment on health for people and plants will be readily acknowledged by apartment growers as true - but they rarely will do anything to correct it. (Privately owned homes are generally not as overheated since it is the user who pays the fuel bills; but many of them still want for adequate humidity in the wintertime.) I am repeating the sermon in the hope in may provoke readers to take the initiative for good health. Unlike smoking, this problem can be easily mitigated.

It is desirable to maintain a 40% to 60% relative humidity in your apartment or home at all

times. You and your family as well as your plants will thrive and luxuriate with adequate humidity; constantly moisturized mucous membranes will produce more comfortable breathing, sounder sleep and far fewer respiratory infections. Your skin tone will be enhanced and the joints of your furniture will stay glued - and your bromeliads will glow in happiness.

When very cold weather arrives, the outside relative humidity drops sharply, because cold air can't hold much moisture. If your radiators or hot air convectors are kept on during this time, the heat will further dry up what little humidity is left in the air. In

THERE WILL BE NO MEETING IN FEBRUARY

such circumstances it is not unusual to find apartments with temperatures at 72 degrees or higher and relative humidities of 15%. What can you do about it?

1. Buy a combination indoor thermometer and a good hygrometer to measure humidity.

2. Keep your heat down to a minimum. (When you feel cold put on a sweater rather than raise the heat.) The daytime temperature should be kept at 68° to 70° depending on your internal thermostat. Under average winter temperatures a well-insulated apartment can be comfortably maintained with radiator valves off, or just barely on - or the blowers of your convectors on "Off". The hot pipes leading into your heating apparatus will usually provide enough heat. (Of course when the temperatures dive into the low 20°s, you have to use some heat.)

3. If your window frames have air spaces, they can be insulated with rubber stripping.

4. Invest in a good, cold-water humidifier. Prices are very moderate and the cost will be amply returned to you in the improved health and comfort of you family and plants. My 10 gallon Oasis humidifier has been running silently and efficiently for over 10 years with only a \$4 foam pad replacement needed thus far. It keeps my 6½ room apartment at about 60% relative humidity the year round. (I was a lot younger and stronger then so I could handle carrying a big bucket of water to fill it almost daily.)

5. You can get some humidity by using a pebble tray or other such device.

Bromeliads are extremely hardy, adaptable plants and they will survive even in a dry apartment, but why grow plants just to survive? In an arid atmosphere a once-a-day spraying is almost a futile gesture, since the spray evaporates faster than it can be absorbed. Give your broms high, constant humidity and you'll quickly see the difference. □

Tillandsia disticha

by Herb Plover

Tillandsia disticha has been blooming for the past 2½ months, growing on a cork log with many other plants under LED lights. In the first 1½ months the relative humidity was about 60% in which the plants luxuriated, but since we were hit with the cold wave a month ago the temperature has hovered around and below freezing with occasional lows of 16° F. This cause the relative humidity to drop precipitively.

I immediately starting running my cold mist humidifier, but it is so dry it has struggled to keep the humidity between 35% and 40% running at 3/4 to full blast. So I have had to refill the humidifier every 2 days or less, but it is easy to fill and clean and it operates silently and does not disturb my sleep. Notwithstanding the low humidity, *T. disticha* has continued to put up flowers from all four of its



Tillandsia disticha

distichous spikes. The petals are yellow/pale green, spread flat so that the bright yellow stamens exceed the petals. One of the spikes has turned inward, deceptively giving a polystichous appearance, but it is attached distichously on the margin opposite its distichous spike-mate. (In distichous spikes the flowers are arranged in pairs on the margins opposite each other. In polystichous spikes the flowers are attached in many series around the circumference of the axis or stem.)

The floral bracts wholly cover the sepals and they are ecarinate (they do not have a longitudinal center ridge or keel.) The leaf-sheaths are broadly ovate, forming a pseudo-bulb. *Tillandsia disticha* produces 50 or more flowers and is an attractive Tillandsia. The leaf-sheaths forming the base have white/brown trichomes but the leaves blades appear to be glabrous.

TILLANDSIA PSYCHOLOGY

by Lloyd Goodman

(Reprinted from an Australian Bromeliad Society Newsletter)

Recent studies suggest any human association with plants - buying, collecting, growing, going for a walk in the park, or even looking at a landscape poster could produce psychological benefits, reduce stress, and improve concentration. To any gardener, this is not rocket science or even news. Plant people know first hand that collecting and working with plants offers a positive effect on ones well-being. But in this context, plants are taken as a mass category.

Very little research has been done on the relationship of specific plant families or genera and why some people are not only attracted to certain plants but are fixated on them, while other plant lovers have no interest in these plants at all. Is it nature or nurture? Are people born with an affinity to certain plants or is it acquired?

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" is a popular reference to William Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, in which Juliet seems to argue that it does not matter that Romeo is from her family's rival house of Montague, and by consequence he is named "Montague".

What is it that is embedded in the name, the colour, the texture, the fragrance, the form, or the biology of a plant that attracts people? For an avid plant collector, it is complex; there can be many aspects to this, but on an elementary level, humans are visual beings. We are easily seduced by attractive vivid colors and shapes. The present fanaticism with social media and in particular Facebook and Instagram highlights a visual culture where value judgements are made in fractions of a second based on what something looks like. Often the text is never read. The expectation is that the single image will communicate more than a thousand words.

It is not surprising that for many people their initial response to a specific plant is on a visual level, particularly when that plant has large colourful flowers or bold foliage. Passionate rose growers are much more in love with the flowers and fragrance than the geometric arrangement of thorns. When it comes to human attraction to plants, a range of senses play a part to varying degrees, sight, touch, smell, taste and, as we shall see with Tillandsias - intellect. There are passionate plant growers who specialize in orchids,

roses, tulips, cacti, succulents, carnivorous plants etc. - the list goes on to encompass the entire plant kingdom.

Like the rose in *Romeo and Juliet*, plants are also loaded with a historical and cultural context. They can act as potent symbols which date back thousands of years and even vary across cultures. Although these are no longer commonly understood by populations that are increasingly divorced from their old rural traditions, some survive. In addition, these meanings are alluded to in older pictures, songs and writings.

New symbols have also arisen: one of the most known in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand is the red poppy as a symbol of remembrance of the fallen in war. Some we might be familiar with are: Orchid - refined beauty, red rose- true love, arum - faith, purity, buttercup - riches. The .wikipedia list is long and detailed - Web.

But neither Bromeliad nor Tillandsia appear on the list. However I did discover this obscure reference. Because they need no soil and look utterly unearthly, Tillandsia is often linked to science fiction, aliens, travel to Mars and other intergalactic matters. it's the perfect plant for nerds, goths, dreamers and lovers of something a bit different. In fact Tillandsias were used as exotic props in the epic science fiction film *Avatar*.

Although there is some logic to this symbolic association, within the current environmental climate I favour Tillandsias as symbols of sustainability and resilience. As a genus, Tillandsias embrace a huge range of weird and wonderful shapes forms and sizes; arguably the greatest range of any plant genus. From the more familiar vase shaped plants like *T. australis*, *T. krukoffiana*, *T. lajensis*, *T. leiboldiana* that have wide strap like leaves and can grow large, to the fine, tangled thread like structures of *T. usneoides*. From the fine woven living balls of *T. recurvata*, *T. schiedeana* to the tiny miniatures like *T. gilliesii*, *T. loliacea*, *T. bryoides*, *T. tricholepis*. From the twisted octopus like leaves of *T. baileyi*, *T. butzii*, *T. pseudobaileyi* to the bulbous forms of *T. bulbosa*, *T.*

streptophylla, *T. seleriana*. The grasslike leaves of *T. tricolor*, *T. juncea*, *T. bartramii* to the heavily trichomed forms of *T. tectorum*.

While some people will never warm to the silver grey foliage and alien shapes of Tillandsias, there is something special beyond the obvious senses that fascinates and attracts one. This is the cerebral understanding of these amazing plants - the psychology of Tillandsias. As there is intrigue with carnivorous plants in how they lure, kill and digest their prey, the cerebral fascination of Tillandsias is embedded in the evolution of sophisticated biological systems that allows them to grow in extreme locations where no other plants can.

How they developed a CAM cycle to store energy from the sun during the day and then use it to grow at night. How some species developed super efficient trichomes to absorb all moisture and nutrients from the atmosphere and even abandoned the concept of roots. How some plants can live in climate zones where there is virtually no rain.

In an age where human activity on the planet is unsustainable and might be termed parasitic, as ultimate xerophitic epiphytes, Tillandsias symbolize

sustainability. They can live on another plant like a tree or cactus but not take any nourishment from the host. As lithophytes, some species are the first plants to colonize barren areas of rocks and sandy deserts or vertical cliffs high in the mountains. The local name "qaqa sunkha" for *T. capillaris*, means "rock beard".

The deeper understanding of Tillandsias might be compared to fine art, where often people simply respond on a visual level. "I don't know much about art but I know at I like". However acquiring a deeper understanding of art history, contemporary movements and ideas in art allows a richer insight beyond a naïve impression. Like other plant families, within the world of Tillandsia collectors, it seems there is also an attraction to the myriad of amazing Latin names associated with these plants and the ability to pronounce the most intricate tongue twisters in the flash of a second.

Once, a comprehensive understanding of the intellectual aspects of Tillandsias is gained, it is impossible to divorce this knowledge from the form, the colour, scent etc. of these plants. There is an erasable memory which links the cerebral with the aesthetic - this is the psychology of Tillandsias.

N E W S and N O T E S

HOMEMADE REMEDY FOR SCALE - In a recent Journal of the New Zealand Bromeliad Society a writer reported that he had successfully tested and used coffee grinds placed on the top of the pot mix to eliminate and keep down scale insects. Most everyone can obtain coffee grounds, and this remedy is far safer to use than most noxious chemicals designed as pesticides. When the plant is watered, something in the coffee fluid acts as an effective pesticide to kill scale insects and their eggs.

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Street, #603, N.Y.C. 10023.

MATERIAL FOR BROMELIANA - This is my annual plea to readers to write something for Bromeliana. It can be anything from a few lines to an article about some growing experience you've. Don't worry about style or grammar. I promise a good rewrite which retains the flavor and character of anything you send in.

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