

BROMELIANA

PUBLISHED BY THE NEW YORK BROMELIAD SOCIETY

(visit our website www.nybromeliadsociety.org)

January, 2016

Volume 53, No.1

SENSIBLE CHANGES TO MY ROUTINES

by Herb Plever

After I became truly addicted to broms, I compulsively acquired every plant I could lay my hands on - whether or not I had room. Soon I was growing hundreds of potted plants and so many cork logs of tillandsias that they needed six consecutive soakings in my bathtub to do all of them.

I built a 7 ft. waterproof tray that had a manzanita “bromeliad” tree in it with pockets to hold “epiphytic” plants, and I set up large fluorescent light units to light it. I was growing masses of plants in every room of our large apartment. To raise humidity I ran four humidifiers which were capable of keeping relative humidity to 40–50% even in the winter.

At the same time I was operating a law office full time, and Sylvia and I had subscriptions to the opera and theaters and went to dance classes once or twice a week. AND, I had and still have the monthly chore of putting out BROMELIANA.

Six one hour soaks of my tillandsia logs took a full Saturday, and I would spend a half day on Sunday to water my pot plants. Needless to say, my wife was justly angry at this substantial intrusion into our weekend time together. Compulsion or not, my marriage was more important to me than my hobby, so I had to make major adjustments. I began to reduce the number of tillandsias I was growing until I ended up with just two 1 hour soakings every week to 10

days, which I could complete in 3 hours early in the morning.

Then I started to make a deep reduction of the number of pot plants which freed up our weekends and substantially eased tensions about my hobby. My routines for my bromeliads were rationalized and I have kept to them for many, many years.

Nonetheless, the task of providing humidity for plants and my fertilizer routine continued to be more tiring and a burden. When I “advanced” into my 80s however, I found that just maintaining such a collection was becoming a physical burden. I saw that with all of my plant and other activity

I was becoming more and more tired at the end of the day even though I was in relatively good health. I started to reduce the number of potted plants, until today I only have 75 of them. I have learned to control my impulse to acquire plants, and I keep the collection at that limit - although I always can find room for a small tillandsia I can squeeze onto a cork log. The cork logs of tillandsias hang in the window of only one room

I used to grow a lot of big plants such as *Portia petropolitana* var. *extensa* and *Vriecantarea* ‘Inferno’ (John Arden gave me a big pup when it was still called *Vriesea* ‘Inferno’). Now I have only a few big plants as *Hohenbergia corriea-araujoi*, *Aechmea* ‘Del Mar’ and *Aech.* ‘Blue Tango’; growing space is



Plant unit in south facing bedroom window

THERE WILL BE NO MEETING IN JANUARY.

BEST WISHES FOR a JOYOUS HOLIDAY and a HAPPY NEW YEAR

limited so I have a limit to my collection. I admit that if I could find one of John Arden's *x Vrieslandsia* or Herb Hill's *x Vriecantarea* 'Seeger' or *x Guzvriesea* 'Happa' at a reasonable price I would succumb to buying it - but first I would dispose of a few plants to make room and keep to my limit of potted plants.

I also had to do something about the chore of keeping four humidifiers filled with water, which in the winter required an almost daily routine of carrying a large 2 gallon bucket of water for each humidifier. By the time I reached 89 years of age that bucket felt like it weighed 50 lbs. There was also the additional hard job of weekly or bi-weekly scrubbing the humidifiers from the crud that collected in them. So I decided my plants would have to adjust to lower humidity and I disposed of the humidifiers.

To reduce my pot plants I disposed of the big living tray and light units. I have only one light unit in a bedroom under which I grow many *Cryptanthus*, a few small *Guzmanias* and *Tillandsia dyeriana*.

Now I have broms growing wick-watered in trays on the double window sills of my kitchen, three bedrooms and my living room. The photo on page 1 shows a large unit in my south-facing bedroom window where I grow 24 potted plants and *Tillandsia xerographica* and *T. seleriana* mounted on small pieces of cork. These *Tillandsias* get soaked along with the *Tillandsia* logs.

Among the potted plants are *Aechmea* 'Blue Tango', *Aechmea* 'Morgana', a mini form of *Ananas comosus*, *Billbergia* 'Strawberry', a dwarf form of *Billbergia* 'Fantasia', a number of *Guzmanias* and mini-*Guzmanias* such as *Guzmania* 'Orangeade', *Guzmania* 'Nacho', *Guzmania musaica* and mini *Guzmania*. 'Charlene', the albo-margined form of *Guzmania* 'Denise', *Tillandsia dyeriana*, *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' and some *Vrieseas* such as *Vriesea* 'Evita', *Vriesea* 'Vogue' and *Vriesea* 'Stoplight'.

The photo above shows the two plant trays in my kitchen window which faces east-south-east. In the trays are: *Nidularium innocentii* var. *lineatum*, *Billbergia* 'Strawberry', *Aechmea echindna*, *Billbergia* 'Poquito Mas', *Aechmea farinosa* var.

discolor, *Hohenbergia corriea araujoi*, *Vriesea guttata*, *Quesnelia* 'Tim Plowman', and *mini Guzmania* 'Mariah'.

Still, there remained the increasingly burdensome routine of fertilizing. I am a proponent of frequent high strength fertilizing which I accomplished by pouring the fertilizer into the cups. Then, within 24 hours, I flushed out the fertilizer from each plant by pouring fresh water into it.

I use two different fertilizer formulas: N11.5-P9-K21.5 and a low nitrogen 5-12-26, (mainly for *Guzmanias* and *Tillandsias*) at a strength of 1/4 tsp. to 1/2 gallon of water. An eighth of a tsp. of magnesium sulfate (Epsom salt) is added to each pitcher. I fertilize weekly during the strong growing season, then bi-weekly and monthly into fall, winter and early spring.

My eureka moment to resolve this issue came when I attended Nigel Thompson's seminar on "To Feed or Not" at the World Bromeliad Conference in Hawaii last year. Nigel operates a bromeliad nursery in Queensland, Australia, and he is an expert on good horticultural practices. He is a strong proponent of fertilizing, but instead of using overhead watering he foliar sprays his plants.

When I returned from Hawaii, I decided to adopt that spray practice. I keep spray bottles with my two different fertilizer formulas in a few rooms and I spray my plants a few times a week in the growing season. When the seasons turn cold and darker, I use the low nitrogen fertilizer on all my plants whenever I water them. This seems to be working well and I am spared from my previous routines of first applying fertilizer and later flushing it out from every plant which took too much time from my day.

The adjustments detailed in this article became absolutely necessary as I aged, but they also provided collateral benefits. With a smaller collection, now I have time to closely inspect my plants when I water them. I check to see how each plant is growing and if it is well established in the mix, and I consider if I need to move it into better or lower light.

I watch for insects and inspect the undersides of *Vriesea* leaves for evidence of spider mites. Those



Plant trays in kitchen window

tiny critters are in every environment by the millions, and they just love to suck on Vriesea leaves. I also look for signs of embedded scale insects and for shiny patches of scale eggs on the topsides of the leaves.

Mites and scale insects thrive in a dry, hot environment. The relative humidity in New York is fairly high from about May through mid-October. In the fall, winter and early spring the air is usually colder and therefore drier as it cannot hold much moisture. Winter heating further reduces humidity.

When I ran my humidifiers I was able to keep relative humidity at 40% or better, but now that I've disposed of them I'm happy to have it around 30%-35%. When it really gets cold the humidity will be even lower.

We don't run the blower motors of the heating convectors in each room; we keep the valves open and rely on the short lead pipe to provide a little heat at the windows. When it's really cold we put on a sweater. The cool environment and the humidity from evaporation from brom leaf axils inhibits pests from

establishing themselves in my plants.

I always have available a spray bottle of Safer's Soap, alcohol, cue tips, a sharp knife and tweezers to take care of problems with insects. Inspection at every watering insures that I can put them down before they spread all over the collection. I don't use chemicals any more, though I often wish someone would manufacture a safe form of Cygon 2E. That systemic pesticide was incredibly effective in killing every kind of insect infestation, but it was banned from production when it was discovered that it contained a carcinogen.

I'll be 92 in March, and I am fortunate that I'm still able to maintain my collection (I water less frequently by letting the plants almost dry out), and I still publish BROMELIANA monthly and on time. Sylvia and I continue to dance twice each week, frequently attend HD operas, the theater and cinema. To have a good life and a rewarding marriage you must be open to make sensible adjustments and learn to compromise. □

OUR HOLIDAY PARTY - GOOD FOOD, GOOD CHEER

Michael Riley and Francisco Correa once again were the generous hosts for our annual Holiday Party. It was held on December 15th.

Michael and Francisco provided a wonderful baked ham, salad and some side dishes. Members brought many tasty side dishes. Some of the children of our beloved Theresa Begley, long-time first Corresponding Secretary of the NY Bromeliad Society, always come to our Holiday Party and bring one of Theresa's famous Italian pasta dishes. This time the Begley family was represented by Robert Begley who brought his betrothed and a great dish of baked eggplant and mozzarella.

This was also an official meeting, and it was voted that all officers and directors be elected for renewed terms. In addition, Nadine Baker was elected as a Director.

Of course everyone inspected Michael's famous cork walls of mounted epiphytes - bromeliads, orchids, cacti, aroids, ferns, etc. We found some new plants and everything seemed to be thriving; a piece

of *Aechmea* 'Ensign' always seems to have just bloomed or is in flower though grown on the side wall next to the south facing window.

The beautifully decorated Christmas tree was matched by the exotic epiphytic walls.



QUESNELIA ‘TIM PLOWMAN’

(Reprinted from the Oct/Nov 2015 issue of BROMELIAD GAZETTE, newsletter of Brom. Soc. South Australia)

Roving Reporter October 2015 (Derek Butcher)

The popular plant was won by Julie Batty with her flowering *Quesnelia* ‘Tim Plowman’.



Quesnelia ‘Tim Plowman’
photo by J. Batty

This is a select form of *Q. marmorata* with extra curly leaves. This caused Bill Treloar (who had been volunteered to be the orator) to wax eloquent on its beauty and its similarity to a Billbergia flower.

Yes, there is a subgenus of *Quesnelia* called *Billbergioides* but as I pointed out things get technical to try to tell what is a Billbergia and what is a Quesnelia.

I can tell you now that among other things botanists are looking for are sepals with obtuse apex (blunt or rounded tip), petals double the length of the sepals and stamens adnate (connected) to the middle portion of the petals for a *Quesnelia*. Discussion ensued as to how we could learn about the different genera. As I said it is hard to do without being technical. Technical is an interesting word because it is a challenge to some and a complete turn-off for others.

(Editor’s note - Julie Batty’s *Quesnelia* ‘Tim Plowman’ deserved to win the popular vote because she managed to keep the lower leaves with their pronounced curl; it certainly is a beautiful specimen. I grow this plant indoors and find that it often loses two lower leaves before it establishes itself in the pot medium. Then I’m left with only the tops of tall leaves to curl in like watch springs. □

NEWS and NOTES

2016 DUES are due and payable now. Single and joint memberships are \$25.00; the domestic subscription rate for BROMELIANA is \$8.00 and an overseas subscription is \$12.00. Please mail your check payable to N.Y. Bromeliad Society to Barbara Lagow, 54 West 74th Street, #603, N.Y.C. 10023. If you have not paid your dues when you read this, please write a dues check and mail it so we don’t have to send you a reminder.

NO MEETING IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY - This is an advance reminder that we will not meet in February in consideration of the low attendance due to anticipated nasty winter weather.

THE WORLD BROMELIAD CONFERENCE - will be held in Houston, Texas, June 13 - 19, 2016. The conference fee is \$250 if you register and pay it by January 31st. The fee will be \$275 after that. To download the registration form or register and pay on-line, click on the Conference Corner icon at www.bsi.org.

| OFFICERS | DIRECTORS |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| President.....Mimi Gussow | Cynthia Percarpio |
| Vice-Pres..David McReynolds | Victoria Ehrlich |
| Treasurer.....Barbara Lagow | Nadine Baker |
| Editor.....Herb Plever | |

BROMELIANA is published 9 times a year by the New York Bromeliad Society, c/o Herb Plever, 172-34 133rd Avenue # 8A, Jamaica, NY 11434. email addr: hplever@verizon.net