

The Bromeliad Blade

Newsletter of the
San Diego
Bromeliad Society

May 2016

VOLUME LI

NUMBER 5

The President's Corner

by Robert Kopfstein

In November of 1785, the Scots poet Robert Burns was ploughing his field when he inadvertently overturned the nest of a mouse. According to his brother, on the spot he composed a poem "To A Mouse."

Nice story.

How many ploughmen carry ink, paper, and quill with them when they are maneuvering an unwieldy plough, all the while controlling a horse who probably does not want to be there in the first place? Nevertheless, here is part of the verse, written by Burns in his favorite Scottish dialect:

Wee sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty
Wi bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murdering pattle.
I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion . . .
fellow mortal . . .

And now come the famous lines:

But Mousie, thou art no thy lane, [not alone]
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley, [often go awry].

At the April meeting the program committee had lined up a speaker to discuss and show how bromeliads can grow well with companion plants – in this case orchids. The speaker had done his homework and spent hours composing a visual composite of images, using a computer program that the SDBS machinery could not fathom. (We since have suggested to him to discontinue using the North Korean software that he got on sale at Walmart. And we are re-thinking the projector that we got at the thrift store – who would have thought to check the "Made in Azerbaijan" label on the bottom?)

At any rate, apologies are due to everyone who attended the April presentation that did not quite come off. And Burns was likely correct in noting that the best-laid schemes of mice and men often go kaffloey.

Rest assured, amends are forthcoming.

And of course, all of this brings us around to the main topic that concerns us all: bromeliads. And it is not only the growers of bromeliads who must face up to the fact that humans are fallible creatures. We style ourselves as intelligent (*Homo sapiens sapiens*: wise, wise man), and yet any gardener can talk at length about his failures, and the sometimes unfathomable mysteries of the plant world.

Think of the time, or more likely times, that you saw an unusual plant at a nursery or plant sale: it cost more than you usually pay, but you just had to have it. You fork over the cash and take it home.

Days, weeks pass and the plant is clearly not happy. You try every growing rick that you know, but the plant does not respond. Slowly it declines, and finally it is ready for the compost pile.

So what went wrong? Obviously something did.

You ask questions of other growers; you look for literature; you try again – different pot, different potting mix, different water schedule, different light exposure.

And occasionally these best-laid schemes work. Sometimes not.

So often in our arrogance we think that we have the upper hand on nature, but ultimately we all need to come to the wisdom that nature often works in ways that are beyond our ken.

Burns ends his short poem telling the poor displaced mouse that he is "blest" when compared to humans who can look both back on past failures and forward to the fear of what may come.

But that does not seem to stop us from going out and buying that pricey specimen that still piques our interest even though the last one has not yet decomposed in the compost pile.

April Meeting

Program

The April talk featured Tom Biggart, member of the San Diego Orchid Society, sharing his experience in growing bromeliads and orchids in the garden in El Cajon. In his presentation, he provided ideas about the choice, staging and placement of both in our gardens and special growing areas. Unfortunately, the slideshow didn't work, and we couldn't see Tom's bromeliads.

Tom will be back with a condensed version of Companions for us – orchids and bromeliads in the upcoming May meeting.

April's Opportunity Table

Featured select collectibles from Tropiflora, starring almost impossible bigenerics: xEnchotia 'Ruby' (see Andy Siekenen's mature flowering plant on page 6, awesome). xNeophytum "Andromeda", xOrthoglaziovia "Rosita". It was the day of the Xs!



Show and Tell table

Show and Tell

Display tillandsias - Donald Nelson (photo)

Tillandsia purpurea 'Shooting Star' - Andrew Wilson

Aechmea ornata nationalis and plain - Robert Kopfstein

Dyckia dawsonii - Dave Kennedy

Aechmea 'Red Bands' - Robert Vitacco

Tillandsia mounted on rock - Al Evans

by Bob Wright

Quesnelia liboniana

Hechtia meziana x marnier x lapostollei

Hechtia marnier-lapostollei

by Pam Peters

Tillandsia lorentziana

Tillandsia leonamiana

Aechmea recurvata 'Bronze Age'

by Nancy Groves

Aechmea caudata 'São Paulo'

Tillandsia duratii var. decomposita from Jim Wright's Collection collected Paraná River Argentina 1975

Tillandsia bergerii

by Scott Sandel

Cryptanthus 'Tropical Heatwave'

Aechmea caudata

by Sonja Wicker

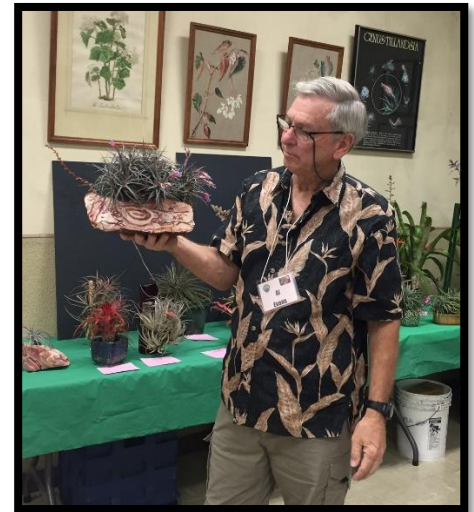
Tillandsia Winner's Circle

Tillandsia aeranthos x stricta

by Lucia Velazquez

Tillandsia Eric Knoblock

Tillandsia IDK



Tillandsia display by Don Nelson (top) and Al Evans with tillandsia (top right)

May Meeting Spotlight: BROM-I-CON

What are the prizes? Can I sell my plants? How do I submit an entry for the show?

Our annual show is right around the corner. In the May meeting, we will be focusing on BROM-I-CON, the annual SDBS bromeliad show and sale. The Show will take place on May 21-22.

All these questions and more will be answered by Nancy Groves and our knowledgeable show organizers. Do not miss this opportunity to ask any questions before the show.

Before the meeting, take a moment to review all forms, regulations and general info plus the fabulous flyer by Scott Sandel which can be printed or attached to an email to your friends and friends of friends. Find the show info here:

http://www.bsi.org/webpages/sdbs/Show_2016/



SAN DIEGO BROMELIAD SOCIETY

BROM-I-CON: 2016 SHOW & SALE

- **SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MAY 21 & 22**
- **10:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.**
- **BALBOA PARK - CASA DEL PRADO, ROOM 101**

An affiliate of Bromeliad Society International

http://www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

Tom Biggart from the SD Orchid Society will be back for a condensed recap on his April presentation which was hurt by technical issues with the projector.



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May Opportunity Table

by Dave Kennedy

For May the plant table will feature a selection from Bird Rock Tropicals. It includes a showy Aechmea orlandiana "Ensign", a number of colorful Neoregelias, a Puya, and (drum roll) a batch of Tillandsias, including Pam Hyatt's masterful "Samantha". and a few choice fasciculatas.

Besides her own stock, Pam is bringing in more imports, it seems. Did you see those incredible T. "Curly Slim" plants she had when she presented in March? Word is they were tissue-cultured in China, then finished in Holland. Far out!

Incidentally, in her blog Pam mentions that Curly Slim is pseudoviviparous, meaning it may (or may not) produce vegetative offsets on the inflorescence as well as the base. So do not cut the inflorescence off too early!

Here's one of the curly slims from March's table. The mature specimen pictured in [Pam's blog](#) is to die for.

**SDBS MEETINGS**

Meetings are held at 10 AM on the second Saturday of each month at Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 104.

San Diego Bromeliad Society Webpage

www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

THE BROMELIAD BLADE

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To send material for the newsletter, please contact Juliana at julianadraposo@gmail.com

Make sure to submit your contribution before the 20th of the month for inclusion in the next newsletter.

2016 SDBS Membership**It's that time of the year again!**

To renew your membership, please contact Al Evans, Treasurer

alevansoo1@earthlink.net

858-492-9866

Renewal Fees: 1 year

Single email \$13

Dual email \$17

Single USPS \$28

Dual USPS \$32

Renewal Fees: 2 years

Single email \$22

Dual email \$30

Single USPS \$52

Dual USPS \$60

Upcoming Events

Highlighted Meetings

May 14, 2016 at 10 AM

San Diego Bromeliad Society
Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 104
All about BROM-I-CON / Tom Biggart, from
SD Orchid Society presenting: Companions
for us – orchids and bromeliads.

www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

June 11, 2016 at 10 AM

San Diego Bromeliad Society
Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 104

www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

June 13 – 19, 2016

Bromeliad Society International World
Conference

Houston, Texas

www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

Monthly Meetings

1st Tuesday, 6:30 PM

San Diego Orchid Society
Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room
101

www.sdorchids.com

2nd Saturday, 10 AM

San Diego Bromeliad Society
Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room
104

www.bsi.org/webpages/san_diego.html

2nd Saturday, 1 PM

San Diego Cactus and Succulent Society
Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room
101

www.sdcss.net

2nd Monday, 5 PM

San Diego Horticultural Society
Surfside Race Place at the Delmar
Fairgrounds

www.sandiegohorticulturalsociety.org

Bromeliads in the Wild

Dennis Cathart, owner of Tropiflora Nursery, one of the largest collector oriented exotic plant nurseries in the U.S. (and featuring bromeliads) will give a presentation on bromeliads as they occur in nature.

The talk will be Monday, May 9, 6:30-8:30 PM at the Del Mar Fairgrounds, Surfside Race Place, Del Mar. Members of the S.D.

Horticultural Society/ free, Non-members \$15. Parking is free; enter at the north end parking lot, north of the main entrance of the fairgrounds.

Couldn't Show and Tell

This month features two outstanding plants! First, check out Andy Siekkenen's xEnchotia 'Ruby'. It certainly does justice to the name.



xEnchotia 'Ruby' - detail of the plant below

Andy's plant is more colorful than the BSI registry plant. Talk about garden conditions...

The second plant is Andrew Wilson's puya alpestris... blooming! I just went over there to see and it looks a thousand times awesomer in person. The blooms are bigger than I thought, and an incredible blue-green color. In his own words:



Patience Needed

by Andrew Wilson

This year has seen the Chilean puyas bloom again San Diego county.

We should know why, but we don't. We had fair rain but not above average; it was a mild winter not a cold one. The last time my *P. alpestris* bloomed was in 2008. The same story holds true for a friend of mine (Ron Chisum) in Escondido. According to Dan Kinnard blooms have appeared for the first time in years at Kent's in Vista.

Some plants have flowers that approach green and others that have blue. You can see different hues depending on the time of day and the angle you view the flowers. The flowers are full of nectar, as Ron found out when he cut the spike and turned it over -his hands were flooded with the amount that poured out.

Huntington Gardens claims their Chilean puyas bloom each year. That does not seem to be the case in San Diego county. However, if any of you know of others who have seen this species or others such as *P. chilensis* or *P. berteroniana* in bloom do let us know.



Andrew's Puya alpestris

Growing Bromeliads from Seed

A few weeks ago, Dave Kennedy came up with a great idea - writing about his progress with bromeliad seedlings. Growing broms from seed is a topic that mystifies a lot of people, as we are so used to growing offsets. Contributions for other SDBS members came pouring in too, with enough great material for a few Blade issues. We will be sharing these stories in anticipation of the seed program that is scheduled for this summer. From germination tips to patience, registered hybrids to species purity, the seed topic is huge. In this issue, we start with Dave Kennedy, followed by an interview with Mauro Peixoto, who owns a seed business in Brazil specializing in tropical plants, including bromeliads.

Thoughts on Seeds

by Dave Kennedy

Everyone who grows bromeliads should try seed propagation. Why should so few of us suffer in silence? In my meager 4+ years of attempts I've had enough success to keep at it, and enough failure to form some (slightly jaded) opinions. First, viable seed from certain genera is dirt-simple to germinate, and grow out. How do you know it's viable?

You don't, unless the producer specifically states previous success with that particular batch. And even then . . .

Okay, you ask, so where do I even get this stuff? The answer is here, there, everywhere! Your own garden will be the most reliable source, because the origin plants and new seedlings will be acclimated and the seed stock itself fresh. This is key: brom seeds have a shelf life that varies, and is largely dependent on the conditions they are stored in. The fresher the better!

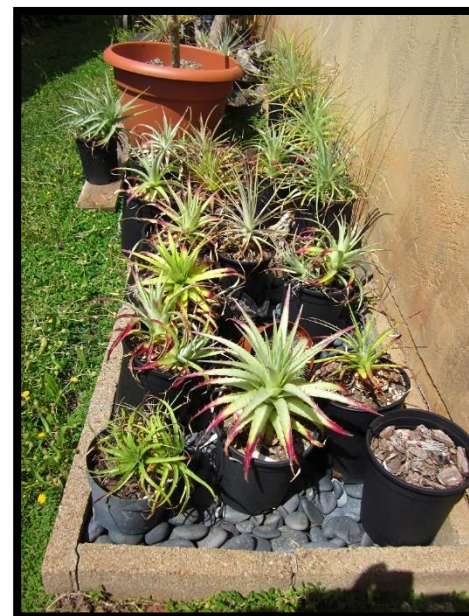
You can easily acquire seeds from other growers. In doing so, the resulting plants may be dissimilar to the parents due the principles of pollination and genetics. If a plant is "open pollinated", meaning the grower took no part in the fertilization process and let nature do its thing, the resulting plants could take on characteristics of any number of local relatives or "traveling salesmen". Indeed, each seed capsule containing many seeds derived from a single flower could produce something quite different from an adjacent seed capsule. Skilled horticulturists do this routinely, as do hummingbirds and other garden visitors.

Then there are the commercial sources. I have tried many. Failures I take upon myself . . . more on that later. Let's focus on some good choices where one can purchase exotic bromeliad seeds for a few measly dollars and have reasonable assurance of success:

Chileflora

<http://www.chileflora.com>

Wanna grow Puyas from seed? You cannot fail. Your only problem will be: what to do with all those Puyas!



Okay, so you've grown a bunch of different Puyas from seed. Now what?

Brazilplants

<http://www.brazilplants.com>

I recently got some *Dyckia* seeds (and some tilly seeds, but that's for later, too) from Brazil, and guess what? They work! *Dyckia* seeds are very easy to start and keep going. At Brazilplants, owner Mauro Peixoto has a wide selection of native species seeds, including many broms. The plants frequently have a locality used in place of a formal name. I have seeds started of several different species, including *Dyckia* "Inhai" (see photos). Wow!



Dyckia "Inhai" from Brazil Plants



This lovely Alcantarea extensa was started from seed three years ago.



Dyckia "Inhai" seedlings (top), seedling detail (bottom)

Brom-L

<http://botu07.bio.uu.nl/data/seedList.php> is where Eric Gouda makes available a great assortment of bromeliad seeds at very little cost. Sometimes, wild-collected seed is sent to Eric in the Netherlands, which is then available to you.

Australia

(no site can sell to USA – Boo Hoo!) A few years back I managed to acquire from Australia some *Alcantarea extensa* seeds, which have been converted into a cadre of thriving plants (see photo). Unfortunately, it is currently impossible to legally obtain any such seeds (let alone plants – fudgetaboutit). It's a cryin' shame!

I've started terrestrial brom seeds in a bunch of different ways. It's best to learn from others, including the pros, then adapt that knowledge to your own circumstances. In a typical backyard setting like mine, it's hard to control the climate as one can in a pro greenhouse. Create a mini-greenhouse by covering your freshly-sown seeds with some type of clear plastic material (some ventilation is required). I now use small pots or segmented seed trays, with a single (okay maybe 2) seed(s) isolated from the others. Otherwise, if you get a high percentage of germination (and if it's good seed you should) you've got a tangled mess to deal with, and the result will be losses or clusters of tiny plants that choke each other.

Using small pots has a serious flaw that must be addressed: moisture loss. I believe it's critical to maintain a fairly constant level of moisture at all times during the germination process. The best way to regulate that is to wick-water your pots. Place pots in a shallow container that you can add water to as needed. Don't let them sit in muck. Nor let them go totally dry. A good tip came from Dyckia hybridist Bryan Chan a few years ago that I've used many times: take a ventilated tray of the type most of us have in surplus and place a trash bag or similar-sized piece of plastic on the bottom and up the

sides. Add your little pots, and add water as periodically needed. If the seasons create water-logged conditions (after your seedlings are established enough to be out with the general population) simply cut the plastic to permit drainage.

Initially, seeds and seedlings are highly vulnerable to fungus, algae and a host of other invasive issues. If possible, sterilize your medium beforehand. Hydrogen peroxide works and oxidizes away quickly. I now use a little spritz of Physam-20. It's a fungicide. You can also spray seedlings with it but don't overdo it. Want to (optionally) do more? Seeds themselves can be loaded with germs. Tissue culture protocols include rinsing/soaking seeds in ethanol for several minutes, then (after thorough rinsing) soaking in sodium hypochlorite – aka bleach (use half-strength household-type) for up to 30 minutes. Rinse well and SOW.

When it comes to Tillandsias and seeds, my head starts to pound and my nerves fray. Why are they so damn difficult? Yes, I have a smattering of different ones that have survived over several years. They're all still tiny. And the losses – oh, the losses! Feels rather apocalyptic from time to time, when great expectations turn into something you'd discard if it were found on bread. My simplistic conclusions are that tilly seeds dry out far too rapidly in most backyard situations. Once exposed to air and light, the clock is ticking madly. Tilly seeds contain very few carbohydrates. They must generate the ability to photosynthesize quickly or perish outright. Upon thorough wetting, viable seed will plump up in a couple days, maybe a week or more but, if allowed to dry out, will never recover. You can try using

plastic drapes, frequent misting and assorted “proximity” methods – the seeds are kept next to an open water source that supposedly provides the vital amount of humidity. But the age-old fight against contamination is nearly always lost. Spraying with a fungicide becomes mandatory, but it’s not always successful.

Oh well. One cannot dwell on failure because it is too easy to try again, to figure out what went wrong (or right, and how come that doesn’t work every time?).

I’ve seen how Chris Davis germinates seeds at his Encinitas location of Wholesale Tillandsias. He attaches long lengths of window screen underneath his large racks of tillandsias. The combination of controlled conditions works very well: the seeds get extra shade but benefit from the steady warmth and just-enough humidity. There is much to be learned from his various processes, not all of which you can duplicate, but certainly emulate.

Koehres <http://www.koehres-kaktus.de/shop/> in Germany has a very intriguing selection of Tillandsia seeds. Yes you can buy from them. Most are cheap – just a few euros. Last year I obtained seeds of *T. carlsoniae* and germinated them via the Aaron Sedivey method, using swaths of cotton partly immersed in water. My problem with this method is that the water will become contaminated after a period of time, without frequent attention. After the *T. carlsoniae* finally germinated on a cotton swath I transferred the seedlings to a regular pot with regular mix that I sprayed like heck with Physam-20 (and still do . . . sometimes). I have to say, there must be a better way, but at least (knocks on wood) for now they have survived (see photo).



These Tillandsia carlsoniae seedlings (from Europe, no less) were begun last year on water-wick cloth and then transferred to this pot, where they mostly “float” above the actual soil on mats of their “parachute string” remnants or bits of wood. I cross my fingers daily, (and spray frequently to keep them moist, sometimes with a fungicide) and these critters have somehow survived several seasons . . . so far.



Tillandsia viridiflora variegated form presents its freshly-prepared seed in a most beautiful “trident” configuration.

Interview with Mauro Peixoto

Tell us how you started your seed business.

I am still a plant hobbyist. All the seeds are from plants from my own collection or given by hobbyist friends. I started the seed business to help cover the expenses from the more than 8000 plants that I have.

Where are your international clients at? What is the profile of your client?

I have clients all over the world, USA, Germany and China are the main Countries and 99.99% are hobbyists, especially because I don't have enough seeds to sell in bulk quantities.

In your plant travels you must've seen a lot of interesting things. Have you ever found any bromeliads unknown to science?

Yes, at least one *Encholirium* was a new plant and was described after I had seen it in Nature. It is *Encholirium kranzianum*. I had this plant for 7 years prior to its publication. I also have *Pitcairnia* that I'm almost 100% sure that it is a new species.

In your opinion, what are examples of underappreciated or unknown bromeliads that should get more attention from plant lovers?

Encholirium is usually "clouded" by its cousin *Dyckia* but although most species are very big demanding lots of space, there are some small and compact species that should get more attention. Also *Pitcairnia* are very easy to grow and have beautiful and showy flowers.



Some of the bromeliad offerings at Brazil Plants: *Pitcairnia* sp 'Chapada Guimaraes' (top), *Quesnelia humilis* Mes 'Salesopolis' (bottom).

www.brazilplants.com/seeds.html