

# The Bromeliad Blade

Newsletter of the  
San Diego  
Bromeliad Society

October 2019

VOLUME LIV

NUMBER 10

## President's Message

By Morlane O'Donnell

Happy fall to everyone. We're finally getting a bit cooler weather with less humid nights. The plants seem to be enjoying the change.

Last month we were treated to a visual array of dyckias and hechtias and were entertained by master storyteller Robert Kopfstein of his adventures in the acquisition of some of his plants. It was an extremely informative program. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, he was not able to demonstrate how to divide these heavily spined members of the bromeliad family. Hopefully he will address that at a future meeting.

This month we are happy to have SDBS member Andy Cuffel who owns Cuffel Farms, speak on Tillandsias. He will also provide the Opportunity Table.

Those of you who took an Aechmea brevicollis seedling last May, don't forget to bring it to the November meeting - dead or alive. Dan Kinnard wants to see the results. He also

wants the form you filled out regarding your growing conditions.

Long time and lifetime member, Gayle Ver Steeg passed away on Sept. 8th. She was president of the SDBS from 1994 through 1995.



*Gayle Ver Steeg (1934-2019)*

Gayle was the treasurer for many years. In recent years she attended meetings and functions when she was able. I'm sure some of you might have gotten your first bromeliad from her. She was an asset to our society and will be missed.

Charles Oelsen had surgery early this month. We wish him a speedy recovery.

Those of you who are members of the BSI probably saw the terrific article in the Journal (Part I) by Juliana Raposo about the World Bromeliad Conference last year. If you haven't, make sure to get a copy and read it. She did a great job, not only in the content, but in documenting activities and participants through pictures she and Xiang Li took. Good job, Juliana! Happy and safe growing to you all.

### Reminders

Please be aware that there are no custodial services for room 104 after the meeting. It is up to us to make sure all tables are put back into their original places and the floor free of debris. If everyone takes 5 minutes to do this after the meeting, it would be very much appreciated. Thank you.

There will be a board meeting at Scott Sandel's home on Sunday, Oct. 20th. It will begin promptly at 10am.

# October Meeting

By Eloise Lau



Andy Cuffel at WBC 2018. Right: Instagramable tillandsias by Cuffel Farms



This month, our very own Andy Cuffel will present on tillandsia design and mounting. Andy will share many different design techniques and ideas that pair well with any style of home or garden decor, especially ones that are tight on extra space. Andy will also present and demonstrate proper tillandsia mounting techniques using a variety of mounting mediums to ensure plants are firmly secure and have room to grow. Attendees will hopefully walk away with a new strategy for tillandsia mounting and some ideas of materials or spaces around their home where they can introduce tillandsia.

## Plant Table

The October offerings will be tillandsias by Andy Cuffel (Cuffel Farms) and some Don Patterson plants, plus some great plants for auction.

## September Meeting Recap

The talk by Robert Kopfstein on spiny terrestrial bromeliads sparked a lot of conversation. The speaker brought along an interesting array of dyckias and hechtias from his private collection. It was a very informative program and very entertaining as well. On the right, Hechtia argentea in Bob Walters' garden. The plant came from Kopfstein. Notice how perfect it looks in a tall planter where it can spread its tentacles at will. We shouldn't be afraid of these stunners.



# September Show and Tell

**Andrew Wilson**

*Vriesea flammea* below



**David Kennedy**

*Vriesea 'Bonfire'* below



*Tillandsia heteromorpha*  
*Tillandsia fasciculata* Honduras  
*right*

**Sandy Valone**

Assorted seedlings

**Al Evans**

*Tillandsia butzii*  
*Tillandsia tenuifolia* 'Amethyst'  
*Tillandsia ionantha* x *concolor*  
*Dyckia* 'Keswick' x 'Brittle Star'

**Scott Sandel**

*Neoregelia* 'Phits'  
*Neoregelia* 'Moana Beauty'  
*Neoregelia* hybrid (lost tag)  
*Neoregelia* 'Goosebumps'

**Lucia Velazquez**

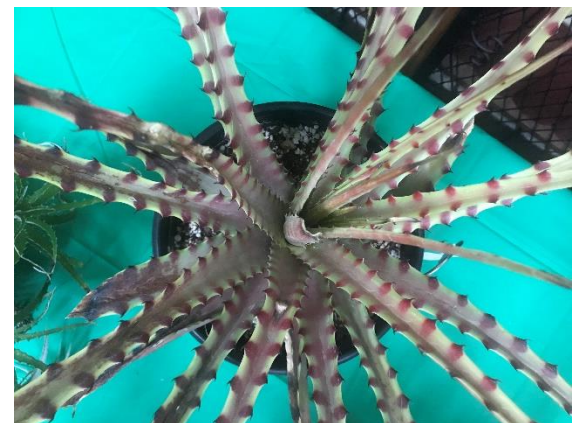
*Billbergia* species/hybrid

**Robert Kopfstein**

*Hechtia* collected in  
Mexico *right*

**Xiang Li**

*Tillandsia*  
'Tropiflora' x  
*chiapensis*  
*below*  
*Tillandsia* 'Pink  
Sorbet'



# The Diverse Ionantha

By Morlane O'Donnell

Last month, after the meeting, I began to reflect upon what it would be like in the beginning stages of starting a collection. Bromeliads are such a diverse group of plants. The beginning collector will find there are many genera within three subfamilies of bromeliads. Once a genus is narrowed down to a species, it can become overwhelming to find that a single species has so many variations. The challenge is what to collect of that species. Take *Tillandsia ionantha* for an example. An ionantha is an ionantha, right? Guess again. There are so many different varieties and cultivars that it boggles the mind. There are those that can be super-sized (cv. 'Sumo Size White' and cv. 'Snowball'), giant (cv. 'Gigante'), big (cv. 'Big Boy'), small (cv. 'Enano,' cv. 'Hazelnut'), fat (cv. 'Fat Boy'), tall (cv. 'Totem Pole' and cv. 'Monkey Tail'), short, tight-leaved (var. *fastigiata*), triangular (cv. 'Pyramid'), and cylindrical (cv. 'Monster'). Most of them will turn a bright or deep red upon flowering (cv. 'Fuego,' var. *stricta*, and cv. 'Fire Up'), but there are some such as the albinos (cv. 'Druid') which remains greenish white and blushes a peach color and (cv. 'Sumo Size White') which remains a chartruse color even while blooming. Both 'Druid' and 'Sumo' have white flowers instead of the usual purple. Some ionanths have patterned leaves such as red and green (cv. 'Two Tone'), variegated, albo-margined, and banded (cv. 'Zebrina'). Ionanths can be thick-leaved (var. *vanhuyningii*, cv. 'Gigante'), succulent-like (cv. 'Apretado'), stiff-leaved, compact, soft-leaved (cv. 'Tall Velvet'), straight-leaved, and curly-leaved (cv. 'Curly Giant'). There is one that has



*Tillandsia ionantha* "Super Boy', 'Peach' and 'Fuego'. All images from BSI Bromeliad Registry

no center but has an apical stem (cv. 'Monstrose'). Ionanths can be named for the country in which they originate (ionantha Guatemala and ionantha Mexico). There is even an ionantha var. *ionantha* - AKA ionantha Guatemala. There are so many, yet each is different. Some differences are obvious, but some are very subtle. Most will form clumps and balls over time. These are only some of many cultivars and characteristics used to illustrate the diversity of species ionantha.

Fortunately, there are several resources such as the BSI, the Internet, Facebook, several bromeliad nurseries, and the SDBS growers where information on the above named ionanths can be found. Yes, there are many kinds of ionantha, but many are easy to grow. Collecting *Tillandsia ionantha* can be very rewarding with all its sizes, shapes, and colors. There is something for everyone and a great species with which to start and sustain a collection.

# Australian Trees for Bromeliads

Article and Photos by Andrew Wilson

During Robert Kopfstein's talk last month questions were raised about the tree materials that might be used for the mounting of bromeliads. That led to discussion of several types of Australian trees. While deviating significantly from the topic of the talk the discussion did raise matters that are relevant to growing of bromeliads in our gardens. Here they are.

## Eucalypts are toxic?

We see little vegetation growing under eucs in woodland areas such as Rancho Santa Fe, Scripps Ranch and in parts of UCSD. Is that due to toxicity of eucs for other plants? No, it's not. It's due to the effect of deep leaf litter, which chokes understory plants and prevents seeds from sprouting by denying them moisture if they do sprout. It's not due to eucalyptus oils preventing the growth of other plants. When eucs were introduced to Southern California to provide lumber for railroads the trees were planted close together and the several species chosen had large leaves and came from regions with higher rainfall than ours. As a result of these actions the leaf litter built up to levels not seen in their native habitat. In those parts of Australia where the climate is mediterranean-type and the rainfall levels are low, similar to ours, the leaves and the trees are much smaller, grow widely apart and the leaf buildup is far less than we see in this area. Eucalyptus leaves, if shredded and allowed to decay, produce excellent material for potting. Shredded compost obtained from the city includes material from eucalyptus trees. It is not toxic to

other plants. But, unless you enjoy taking risks, do not eat the live leaves. They can be toxic to some people.

## Euc branches for mounting bromeliads

The trees provide excellent material for mounting bromeliads. There are nearly a thousand species and the branch and bark forms are very varied. For bromeliads avoid the species that shed their bark and choose the more suitable such as the ironbarks. (See *E. sideroxylon* below)



These trees have a hard, deeply channeled bark that stays on the trees for many years allowing you to mount plants on the trees. If you mount on bark from cut branches, you'll need to drill a hole or two to insert a wire to hold the plant in place or you can simply glue it to the bark. That's a little more work than simply pushing an awl through cork but the euc bark is stronger.

## How about Melaleucas?

Another group of Australian trees that can be very useful for providing mounting sites for your bromeliads are the melaleucas. Their leaves are not large, not spiky and not covered in resin. The best-known species is *M. quinquenervia* has thick, soft bark that is used by many Australian bromeliad enthusiasts. In this case you need to pull off the bark, a soft material that can be as thick as 6 inches. Mounting plants on the tree is impractical because it will shed large pieces of that bark every few years. Its bark is easy to work. An awl can penetrate inches through it and it accepts glue attachment well. Note that because it is not structurally strong it must be attached to a firm backing. The trees should be

pollarded annually to limit height and encourage a thick, stocky base for better production of the soft, puffy bark.

## Tea trees

A third group Australian trees that can help us are the tea trees (as distinct from ti trees), or more accurately, leptospermums.

Sometimes called tea trees after Captain Cook's crew, arriving on the east coast of Australia, brewed the leaves (of a different tree *Melaleuca alternifolia*) for tea that was used for combatting scurvy and other medical purposes. *Leptospermum*s are easily grown in our gardens. Ranging in size from shrubs to small trees they stand up well to windy conditions. Unlike the other two groups they do not provide thick bark materials. On live or cut branches the bark often loosens into strands, making glue attachment difficult or even impractical. It is easier to drill screws for hanging plants (right).



The large species, *Leptospermum laevigatum*, (below) with its long, arching branches and small leaves provides a moderately shaded cover and is an excellent host for tillandsias, aechmeas or neoregelias

either attached, suspended or seated in crotches. It rarely grows taller than 20 feet and is often less. These Australian trees all belong to the myrtle family, *Myrtaceae*, they are easily grown in our area and are not

spiny. In drier parts of South America where many bromeliads grow small trees acting as their hosts occur in dry scrub and thorn forests. You can imagine how friendly they are. Fortunately, in such a large region there are many gorgeous exceptions.



# Bromeliads and Aquariums

First published in 2009, by Al Evans



**What do bromeliads and aquariums have in common? The need for quality water!!**

I have been involved with bromeliads for only a few years now, but I have maintained aquariums since I was 9 years old. Over the preceding 15 years or so, I have become much more interested in the planted aquarium than the fish usually associated with tropical aquariums. Although this trend towards planted tanks has been slow in the US, planted aquariums have been important in Europe for many years. The problem in San Diego is our tap water is not well suited for planted aquariums. The answer, ...a reverse osmosis system that produces high quality, soft water from tap water with a slightly acidic PH. This lower PH along with the waste from tropical fish can cause a very low PH in the aquarium over time (RO water is not well buffered) which can be detrimental to the plants and deadly to the fish. The solution is to change a portion of the water regularly. But what to do with the discarded aquarium water with a PH sometimes lower than 6.0 (pretty acidic!)? On a visit to an orchid nursery in Thailand where all the

orchids are grown hydroponically, I found that the water they use has a PH around 5.0. I also found in reading that many bromeliads appreciate a soft water with low PH. It turns out the two interests, bromeliads and tropical fish aquariums, are complimentary. I no longer miss aquarium water changes which has sometimes had bad results in the past (loss of fish!) because I need a steady supply of the discarded water for the bromeliads and orchids. Since discovering that I could use my discarded aquarium

water as a source of water for bromeliads, my aquarium maintenance has improved dramatically, with aquarium water changes being much more consistent. Both the aquarium plants/fish and the bromeliads seem to be benefitting. I use the low PH water almost daily (during the warm summer months) on most of my potted bromeliads and Tillandsias in particular. I use a 3-gallon sprayer to dispense the water. Sometimes, I also add a dilute (1/4 strength) fertilizer to the water. I use urea free orchid food (20-10-20) or "epiphyte delight". So far, the results have been encouraging and the Neos and Tillandsias appear to be thriving.



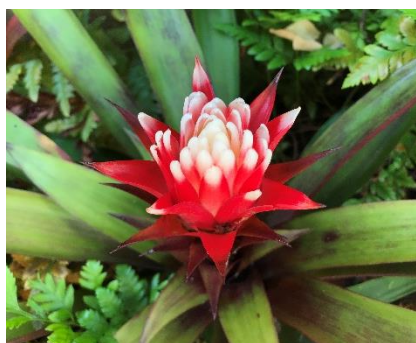
*Al, showing a flawless Dyckia 'Keswick' x 'Brittle Star' in the September meeting. Aquarium water?*

## Upcoming Events

### SDBS Meetings

**October 12, 2019, 10:00 AM**  
**SDBS Monthly Meeting**  
 Balboa Park Casa del Prado, Room 104  
 1650 El Prado, San Diego 92101  
[www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org](http://www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org)

**November 9, 2019, 10:00 AM**  
**SDBS Monthly Meeting**  
 Balboa Park Casa del Prado, Room 104  
 1650 El Prado, San Diego 92101  
[www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org](http://www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org)



### Monthly Meetings

**1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday, 6:30 PM**  
 San Diego Orchid Society  
 Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 101  
[www.sdorchids.com](http://www.sdorchids.com)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday, 1 PM**  
 San Diego Cactus and Succulent Society  
 Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 101  
[www.sdcss.net](http://www.sdcss.net)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday, 7 PM**  
 San Diego Epiphyllum Society  
 Balboa Park, Casa Del Prado, Room 101  
[www.SanDiegoEpi.org](http://www.SanDiegoEpi.org)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Monday, 5:45 PM**  
 San Diego Horticultural Society  
 Congregation Beth Israel (CBI)  
 9001 Towne Centre Drive  
 San Diego, CA 92122  
[sdhort.org](http://sdhort.org)

## Tillandsia Collection for Sale

Rhonda Smoot, a former SDBS member, is selling her tillandsia business. She wants to sell her entire tillandsia collection as a whole. Rhonda says there are enough tillies to partially fill a small greenhouse. Contact Rhonda directly if interested: [rjsmoot@gmail.com](mailto:rjsmoot@gmail.com)

## SDBG Fall Plant Sale

Saturday & Sunday, October 19 and 20 – 10 am – 4 pm  
 Monday, October 21 – 9 am – 12 noon

The annual plant sale at the San Diego Botanic Garden is upon us with California natives, cacti, succulents, bromeliads, fruit trees and sub-tropical plants.

Visit Botanic Attic for garden-related vintage items, and homemade goodies such as specialty jellies.

Plant donations from local growers, wholesalers, retail nurseries and individuals make this one of the most interesting and diverse plant sales in all of San Diego County.

## SDBS 2019

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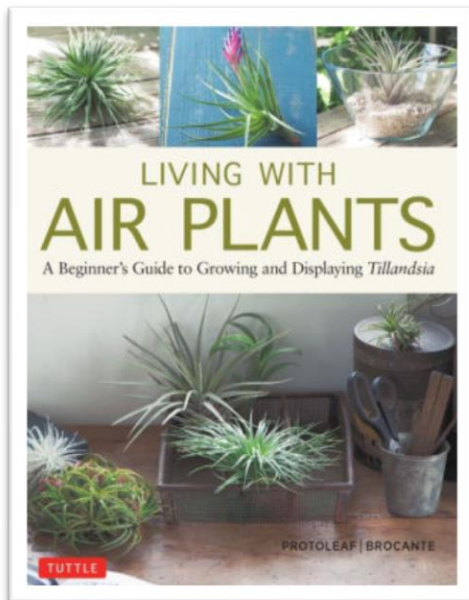
Charles Oelsen (2018-2019)  
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# Three New Books to the SDBS Library

by Eloise Lau

**Living with Air Plants, A Beginner's Guide to Growing and Displaying Tillandsia** by Yoshiharu Kashima and Yukihiro Matsuda



Mr. Kashima is a botanist and media commentator on air plants and plants in general in Japan. Among his many responsibilities is manager of tukuribaGREEN, a specialist plant boutique.

Mr. Matuda is a gardening and lifestyle author, landscape architect and owner of Brocante, a Yokohama antique and home goods shop. He is responsible for the sections on how to use tillandsia to their best advantage in decor.

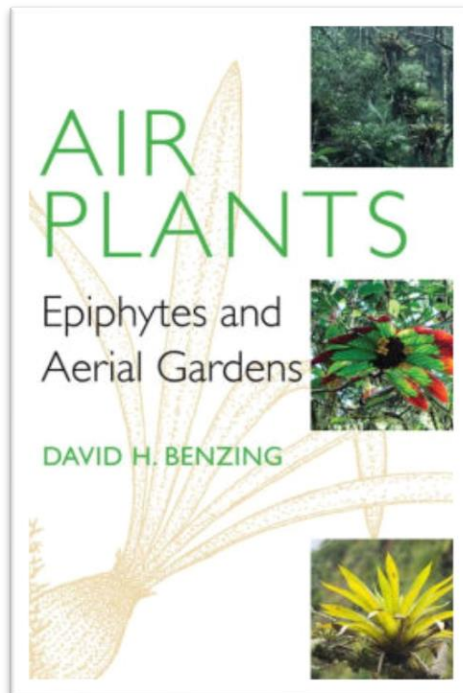
Mr. Kashima noticed that recently more and more people are trying to grow air plants hence this book was conceived to help these beginners gain some knowledge of tillandsia and their cultivation.

The book includes information on the basics including the various types of

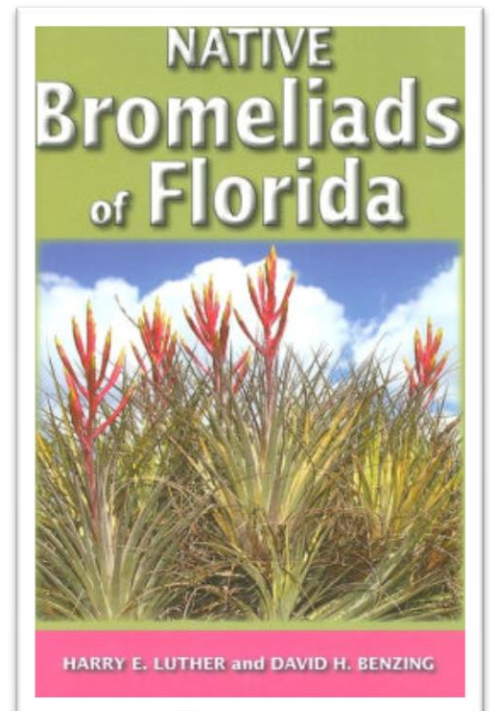
tillandsia, their characteristics, growth cycles and growing conditions. Also included are sections on propagating and dividing and providing creative habitats for maximum enjoyment of tillandsia. Lots of color photos.

**Air Plants, Epiphytes and Aerial Gardens** by David H. Benzing

Dr. Benzing is currently at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Florida. His research focuses on the adaptive biology of vascular epiphytes including orchids and bromeliads. He has done studies on the use of epiphytic bromeliads in monitoring air quality. A scientific treatise on epiphytes—what they are, where they came from, how they live and reproduce. There is a section on the epiphytic bromeliads.

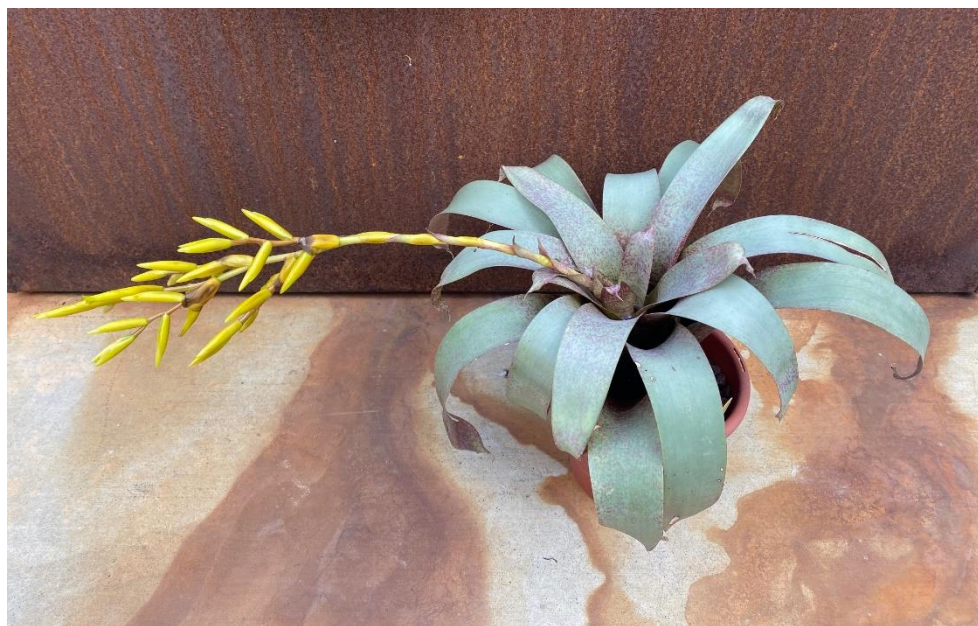


**Native Bromeliads of Florida** by Harry E. Luther and David H. Benzing

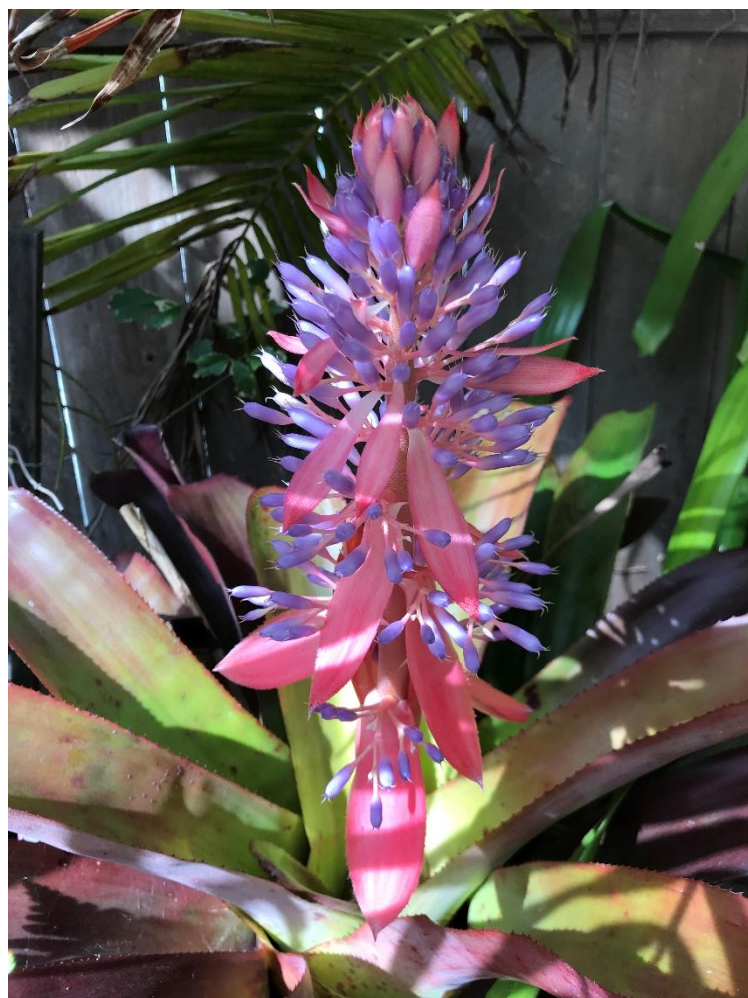


At the time of publication both authors worked at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota, Florida. Selby Gardens is the leader in the study, conservation and display of epiphytes and their canopy habitats. The Gardens maintain the best collection of epiphytes in the world. Sixteen of the world's bromeliads and 2 natural hybrids live in Florida. This book introduces them all, with means of identification, characteristics, distribution maps, and color photographs.

# Blooming



*Vriesea saundersii* and *Portea* 'Candy', Juliana Raposo



## THE BROMELIAD BLADE



Newsletter of the San Diego  
Bromeliad Society

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

### SDBS MEETING

The club meets on the second  
Saturday of the month at 10am in  
Balboa Park, Casa del Prado,  
room 104.

### SDBS WEBPAGE

[www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org](http://www.sandiegobromeliadsociety.org)