

# SEMBS

SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN BROMELIAD SOCIETY

AFFILIATE OF BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

**NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2016**



*Tillandsia diaguitensis* Cast. 1929, named for Diaguitas, the region where it was first found. Epiphytic in Argentina

At our October meeting, we had a discussion about some of the challenges that we face here in Michigan to keep our bromeliads looking happy and healthy through the winter months. Some are obviously easier than others, but it seems that we often find ourselves drawn to some of the tricky ones! Drew Okla has offered some of his insights and advice in an article included in this newsletter.

It was enthusiastically decided that our November meeting will take place on Saturday, November 19, 2:00 p.m. at [Matthaei Botanical Gardens](#). It has been arranged that we will have a “volunteer work day” with the Bromeliad collection there. For our newer members, this is an excellent opportunity to get a “behind the scenes” look at the bromeliad collection. The plants thrived in their brief summer vacation outdoors, so there are many plants in need of dividing and repotting! Tools will be provided, so plan to come and get your hands dirty! We will be working in Greenhouse #2.

The December meeting will be our annual Holiday Pot Luck meeting at Lynne and Pat Echlin’s home located at 1420 Avon Circle W, Rochester Hills, MI 48309. The date will be Saturday, December 10, at 1 p.m.! RSVP to Lynne at 248-651-9521, or email her at [lechlin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lechlin@sbcglobal.net) so she can plan accordingly. Lynne and Pat are generous to provide the meat, potatoes, and drinks. Bring a side dish or dessert. If you have a plant or two to bring to display, it will add to the festive nature of the occasion!

A few pictures from the October meeting-



Drew Okla with a specimen clump of *Tillandsia aeranthos* x *bergeri* from our spring 2015 plant order. Is it possible that it has doubled in size?!



*Tillandsia capitata* var. *domingensis*



Tillandsia ionantha rooted onto a Cereus cactus

Beautiful assortment of well grown, Dyckias and Hechtias.



A nice selection of bromeliads on Drew's handmade cedar plant shelves

A colorful assortment of "Show & Tell" plants that were brought to the meeting.



A couple of nice fall blooming bromeliads from Paul Wingert's collection--

Till. 'Sandy' (cv. of *T. cyanea*)



*Neo. ampullacea* x 'Whirlwind'



*Neoregelia kautskyi*- a wonderful species that blooms in October and November. The flowers self-pollinate, and the plants are easily grown from seed. Leaf colors continue to intensify for several months after flowering has finished!



## **The Encumbered Life: Living (and Moving) in Michigan with Lots of Bromeliads *by Drew Okla***

The impulse to collect is a peculiar one; in the most mild cases, the collector may be deemed merely eccentric, his array of esoterica an amusing quirk. When the affliction is severe, one may be seen as outright insane, monomaniacal. Perhaps the obsession was begat by some childhood trauma, or maybe a stress-induced bout of psychosis? Perhaps it's simply some congenital neurosis?

The desire to collect may be ultimately inscrutable; whatever the impetus, plants are a quarry especially onerous to the collector: even after they've been acquired, constant care is needed, and thus the task of their curator grows in direct proportion. What's more, the vast number of species (and literally innumerable hybrids) makes a "complete" collection impossible—an aspect that makes the pursuit the more compelling, if also futile and frustrating.

Cultivating bromeliads, cacti and orchids has been immensely rewarding and enjoyable, but at times the size of our collection has increased at the expense of its maintenance. Periodically new specimens have flourished as older ones were neglected. I still believe it's better to cultivate rigorously a few outstanding specimens than to possess a vast and varied collection where many merely exist; but alas, the pang of excitement that comes with seeing something new and exotic is often too much to resist!



Before our move we'd established, over several years, an environment that could reasonably accommodate some of the more delicate plants with more exacting requirements. Humidity is perhaps the most difficult parameter to maintain consistently, and a timed misting system installed in the summer of 2014 helped immensely; we were rewarded with blooms from many

of our more tender orchids (the tiny *Chiloschista segawai*, the even-tinier *Platystele umbellate*, our Vanda, et. al).

In the winter of 2014-15, after packing the multitudes in tightly and installing a rather dubious electric heater, the whole thing was sealed with several layers of bubble wrap (drawing perplexed amusement from our neighbors and the ire of the city inspector). Last winter we decided instead to try everything under lights in our basement. Several kilowatts of metal halide and high output fluorescent bulbs run from 8 to 14 hours daily actually dealt a lesser blow to our electric bill (a 1500-watt heater was run constantly to keep the greenhouse temperature above 50 degrees at night in midwinter), and yielded impressive results: we had many blooming cacti and stapeliads in February, and many of the neos in the brightest areas developed impressive color. All the light, however, came at the cost of moisture; the immense heat dried everything so quickly that it was a chore to keep the less drought-tolerant broms (e.g. Pitcairnia, crypts) watered adequately.

In Michigan, March is generally not a propitious time to move a collection of fragile tropical plants. Many were crammed haphazardly into cardboard boxes, which were then crammed haphazardly into a U-Haul, then left mostly on their own in our sunroom for several weeks until they could be resituated properly.

No longer on a municipal water system, the hose cannot now be relied upon as a convenient water source, nor can the faucet during winter (our water usually yields a TDS reading of around 200ppm). Our house lacks gutters, so our previous rain collection system is no longer practicable. This necessitates gathering lake water (TDS ~80ppm) by the bucket—a rather tedious operation.

Since we plan to move to a permanent home in the next few years, we've decided that the time, effort and expense of reassembling and heating the greenhouse in the interim would exceed its benefits. A busier work schedule has also limited the amount of time and attention the plants have received since their rehoming. As a result, most have been left outside at the mercy of the elements. Scant rain and high temperatures have thus proved a challenge, but it is surprising, though, to see how durable many bromeliads are; most Billbergias, Neoregelias, and Aechmeas appear unfazed after a week of 90-degree days with little to no water (an ounce or so in the cup seems enough to sustain them for a prolonged period).

In preparation for the coming winter I built a number of large slatted cedar shelves to maximize the available light and efficient use of space in our sun room. Being on the north side of our house, the already-limited natural light available during winter's short days will be supplemented by a scant few fluorescent fixtures (not to exceed 1000 watts). To spare our carpeting, little or no supplementary humidity will be provided.

I've already begun to consider plans for a proper greenhouse, the erection of which will constitute our first "home improvement project" when we do own our property. 20' x 24' seems a reasonable figure; yet, no matter the dimensions, I harbor no delusions about its adequacy to foster an entire collection that is constantly—in more ways than one—growing

