

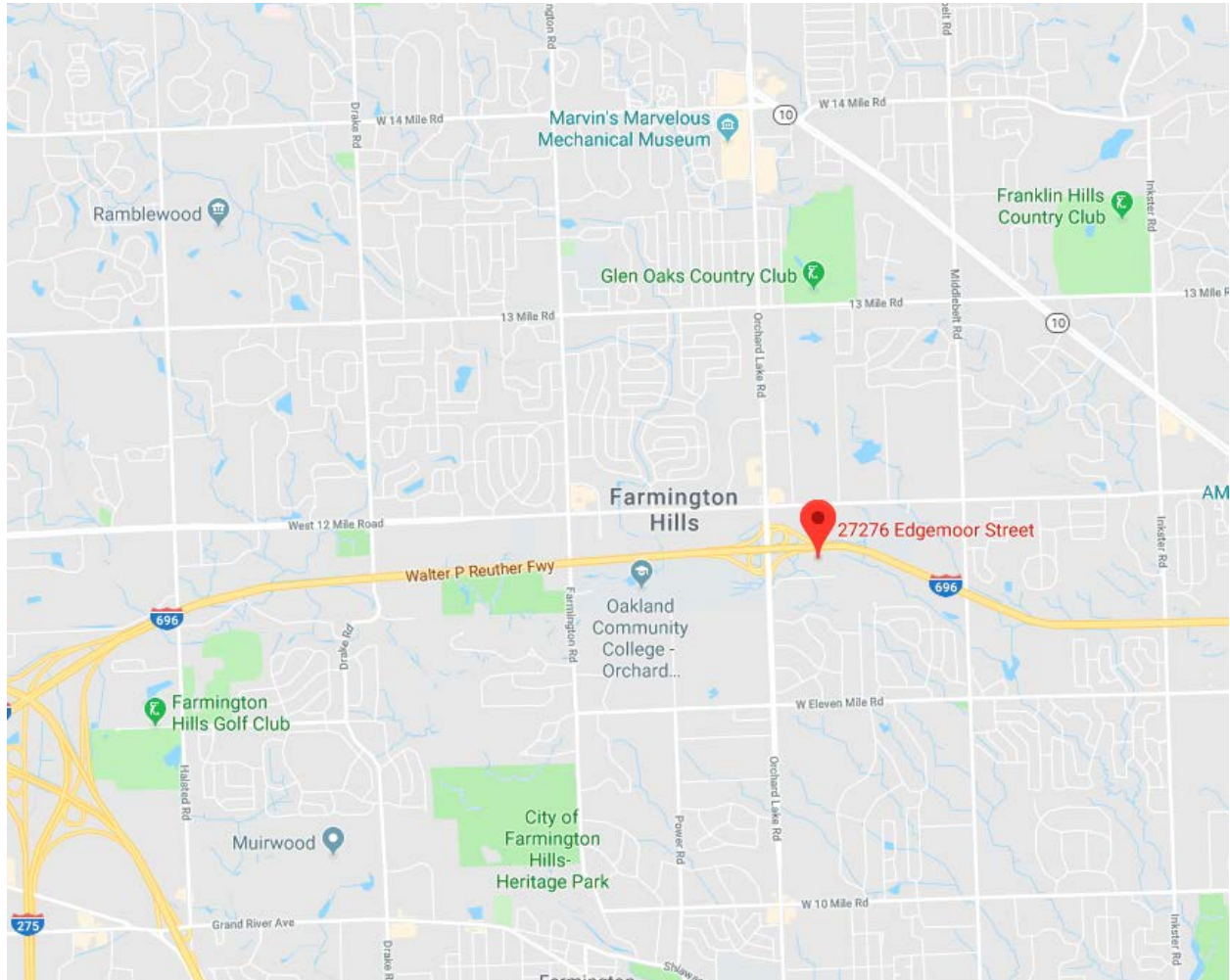
SOUTH  
EAST  
MICHIGAN  
ROMELIAD  
SOCIETY



May - June 2018

THE MAY MEETING will convene **2 p.m. this Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup>**, at the home of Paul and Karen Wingert:

27276 Edgemoor St., Farmington Hills, MI 48334



The thrust of the May meeting will be, as ever, distribution and discussion of this year's spring plant order (even if you didn't place an order last month, some "grower's choice" plants from Michael Kiehl and many Tillandsias are sure to be available). We'll also spend some time perusing and discussing Paul's collection in the shadehouse; liberated from the comparatively cramped environs of the greenhouse after another Michigan winter, it's always a treat to see the Spring vigor of new blooms and bright foliage as the plants bask in the fresh air and increased daylight!

The June meeting will convene at Drew and Malorie's home in Chelsea, at 2 p.m. Saturday, June 19<sup>th</sup>. As this meeting follows the World Conference (May 29<sup>th</sup> - June 3<sup>rd</sup>) in San Diego, there will be a report to our local affiliate by members who attended. There will certainly be some photos to share, and—if the past is any guide—some show and tell of plant acquisitions from the conference!

## Forget Dogs, or Diamonds: Bromeliads Are One's Best Friends



Two heads are better than one: despite a dark dry winter, *Dyckia hebbingii* (spineless form) and *D. 'Ruby Snow'* are both showing incipient apical division, a common and appealing characteristic within the genus, as single plants can quickly form robust clumps.

**R**establishing our collection outdoors after a rough winter was a relief for us and the plants, as heavy rains took care of the watering and I no longer had to agonize about the lack of light. This winter especially, a paucity of time, very dry environment and lack of a good watering solution resulted in a few losses (mostly some of the more delicate mesic species), and not a few plants that looked...more dead than alive, frankly.

Yet perusing our collection after a week or so outside, I was reflecting on the good fortune of bromeliad enthusiasts; the cultural requirements of most broms don't exact too stiff a price (financial or horticultural) on the grower, so even those without an abundance of time, money and space can still maintain rewarding and respectable collections.

By contrast, those who have the misfortune to become enamored with orchids seem inevitably to become slaves to their collections. Indeed, we successfully kept (and bloomed) a minute *Chiloschista segawai* for several years, but it survived primarily in our greenhouse with a timed and humidity-regulated misting system, and Malorie and I had more free time (and rainwater) available to tend to its every whim.

Absent a climate controlled greenhouse—or any greenhouse, for that matter—the mettle and dedication of the grower can be tested trying to keep a large collection alive, let alone thriving, in what are at best suboptimal conditions. But while fussy orchid species from remote cloud forests seem to keel



Thankfully, no commonly cultivated bromeliads are like this tiny leafless Taiwanese orchid, *Chiloschista segawai*. Photo credit Kuo-Chu Yueh

over with the merest whiff of dry air or a week of temperatures a scant few degrees above room temperature, we had neoregelias, aechmeas and billbergias this year, having been pushed to the back of a crowded shelf and going near bone dry for weeks, seem to make a supernatural recovery after a good dousing and a few weeks outdoors. Many broms even appear to be shockingly cold-tolerant: Paul reported one *Vriesea phillipo-coburgii*, a large mesic species native to the rainforests of eastern Brazil, surviving a 14 degree day one winter!

Most commonly cultivated semi-terrestrial varieties—yes, they're happy growing as epiphytes, or in a pot, or in the ground—seem utterly indifferent to the growth medium, so long as it offers decent drainage. Though proper fertilization is necessary to produce quality blooms in some plants (e.g. vrieseas, tillandsias &c.), most broms grown for their foliage seem to show great color so long as they receive good sunlight and warmth in the spring and summer (and not too much nitrogen). Even species native to wet, tropical climes can be surprisingly drought-tolerant; I was especially shocked to see that one of our pitcairnia, *P. smithiorum*, had bloomed during the winter and entirely escaped our notice.



Our collection as of May 2018

By comparison, bromeliad devotees are a humble lot. Numerous books (and grower lore) detail the danger, violence, subterfuge, espionage, and general insanity that has been part and parcel of the orchid trade for centuries (see Eric Hanson's "Orchid Fever: A Horticultural Tale of Love, Lust and Lunacy"). No such books exist about bromeliads; the nearest literary equivalents are likely Chester Skotak's "Searching for Miss Fortuna" or Tropiflora's "Cargo report"—and that's not saying much.

But so what. As I admire our collection each day, I'm reminded of the immense reward bromeliads consistently afford the grower—even if he or she might not really deserve it.

That's as close as a non-sentient thing gets to loyalty.

## GROWER'S TIP

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Most plants are in essence stationary organisms, and bromeliads are of course no exception. Indeed most of our container-grown plants—shuttled in and out of doors during winter, ferried to plant shows, and generally knocked about—seem to do best when they sit securely and remain unmolested. Broms too large for our plant table get put on the ground, but as even larger species generally maintain disproportionately small root systems, they are seldom potted in a container larger than 6" in diameter, making them top-heavy.

Incidentally, a standard 6" plastic pot fits perfectly in a cinder block laid on its side: the taper holds it securely in place, elevates it from the ground slightly, and the weight of the concrete could probably anchor it through a category 2 hurricane. Our plants were constantly being upended, by the elements or local fauna, damaging the leaves and constantly spilling water from the cup. The cinderblock solution, though seemingly obvious and trivial, has made a big difference and seems worth sharing.