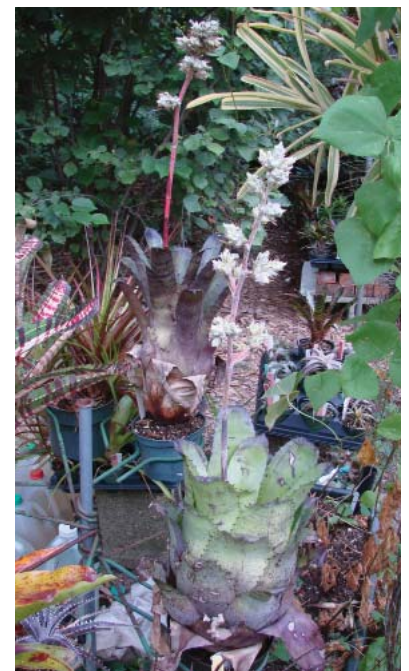


south -
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march + april 2020

EXOTIC GENERA, BE-STRIPED BEAUTY



HOHENBERGIAS, VARIATION galore (clockwise from upper left)—a *Neoregelia* hybrid by Paul Wingert; *Nidularium rutilans variegata*; *Vriesea* 'Candy Stripe'; *Hohenbergia leopoldo-horstii*; H. 'Double Hyphen Select'; *Aechmea chantinii* 'Samurai'; and *Neoregelia* 'Lorena Lector'

March Meeting

Like virtually all of society, the March meeting has been cancelled.

Fortunately, bromeliads' immunity to Coronaviruses is well documented in the scientific literature.

Celebrating 40 years of Discovery

by Paul Wingert

In December of 1979, renowned botanists Lyman B. Smith and Robert Jack Downs published the third and final installment of their historic Monograph on the Bromeliaceae; this represented, substantially, all that was known about the Bromeliad family at the time. It described a total of 2,089 species in 46 different genera, consolidating hundreds of years of scientific exploration along with records of thousands of botanical collections. The three volumes, containing some 2,142 pages (and not a single color photograph), stand as a well-respected resource, and still inform present-day research and classification. But as we go through 2020, it is worth reflecting on the past 40 years and highlighting some of the immense gains in knowledge that have accrued since.

The current taxon list (available at bsi.org) cites 3,063 species, 59 genera, and 8 subfamilies as of this writing—a nearly 1000% increase in number of known species in the past 40 years. Of course, not all this is the result of new plant discoveries: new scientific methods are largely responsible. Before 1980, botanists relied on details of plant morphology that could be visually observed (i.e. phenotype). More recently, dramatic developments in research involving DNA analysis have allowed researchers to create a kind of “family tree,” illuminating which plants are the ancestral family members and where various genera branch off—even details of species relationships within many of the genera are discernable. Furthermore, it helps to explain why some complex and perhaps unnatural genera (*Aechmea*, e.g.) deserve to be shuffled and reclassified.

This is by no means an attack on the work of Smith and Downs; in many cases the DNA analysis actually confirms previous phenotypical classifications, and that it does establish many sibling correlations. Still, for me the excitement isn't so much in the research, but in the discovery of new plants. Though not all are necessarily worthy of cultivation, it is remarkable to consider the many new introductions over the past four decades and contemplate just how many spectacular new bromeliads are available to plant lovers.

At our next meeting—whenever that may be—we'll begin our journey through these many discoveries with a look at the genus *Hohenbergia*. This group is a little off the growers' beaten path, but offers many tough plants that have evolved in challenging environments. *Hohenbergias* offer lots of character and often unique shapes; some of them epitomize nature's ability to create the perfect design to maximize efficiency of water collection and impoundment while minimizing transpiration. The genus *Hohenbergia* had a total of 20 described species in 1979, and only a few were well known at the time, with *H. stellata* the sole species being widely cultivated (even then, several of the species described had only recently been discovered). The current taxon list cites 49 species—a number likely to rise given several plants are only referenced by their recent collection data, with many of these newly discovered proving popular with collectors.

There is even a Facebook group, “Planet *Hohenbergia*,” with over 1,000 members.

Events...?

April Meeting / Spring Plant Order (TBD / subject to change)

Saturday, April 18, 2:00 p.m.

Graye's greenhouse has offered to host the April meeting, but again, this is subject to change.

Generally the April meeting is the time our "Annual Spring Plant Order" is arranged, but it's postponed until further notice.

The April meeting's theme is/was to be "a brief history of variegated plants in the bromeliad family." We are spoiled with the incredible assortment of variegated plants available today...but it hasn't always been that way; not so long ago variegated bromeliads were rare, and expensive. In April (or at a future meeting in the event of cancellation), a presentation will explore variegation of plants in the wild, and answer some of your burning questions about this esoteric phenomenon: what causes variegation? Why and how did variegated cultivars quickly become so numerous? Why do some variegates revert or become albino?

May Meeting (TBD / subject to change)

Saturday, May 16, 2:00 p.m.

The May meeting is, at present, set to be hosted at the home of Paul and Karen Wingert, 27276 Edgemoor, Farmington Hills, MI 48334. The main agenda will be distributing the Spring plant order; additional program details to follow.

BSI World Conference

RESCHEDULED / June 10-13, 2021

The biennial event, previously scheduled this year in Sarasota, Florida, has been rescheduled for the same dates/same location next year. Several of our local society members are planning to attend, and we'll designate an official society representative at the March meeting to report back on their experiences at the conference.