



BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF GREATER CHICAGO

THE BSGC NEWS

April-May , 2013

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Lori Weigerding

Our next meeting will be June 9th at 2 PM at the Chicago Botanic Garden in the Annex building. We hope to see you there. The May meeting was cancelled since we want you to enjoy Mother's Day. Please mark the date for our Show on your calendar. Set up is July 19th and the Show is the 20th and 21st.

President's Column

Well we had an interesting meeting! It was nice to see Gerry & "his girl" Audrey at the meeting! We talked about how we mount our tillandsias and what glue to use. It was fortunate for us that Larry brought his tablet along!! He had a bunch of different mountings that he's done and they were superb! He has a lot of creative ideas! We should see if he'd like to publish some of them in the newsletter.

Set-up is Friday, July 19th, with the show being held the 20 & 21st. As we discussed we'll be doing it again with the Cactus club and we decided to purchase more plants this year.

Maybe Larry will enter some of his creations into the show! What do you think Larry?

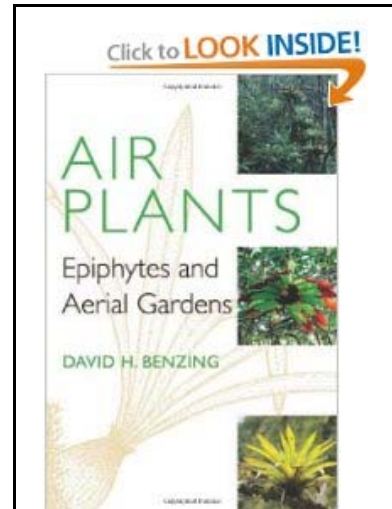
As mentioned we won't be having a meeting in May since it's Mother's Day, so we'll see you all on June. 9th. If you have any ideas for the show bring them along so we can discuss them!

Thanx to everyone that came to the meeting!! Without YOU, there is no US!

Lori Weigerding

The Florida West Coast Bromeliad Society Newsletter in March had an interesting article about the evolution of plants.

Dr. David Benzing's presentation was titled *How Does Bromeliaceae Demonstrate the Reality of Darwinian Evolution?* He discussed four common myths about the process of evolution and showed us examples of how bromeliads illustrate the process. He covers this topic in greater detail in his new book *Air Plants: Epiphytes and Aerial Gardens*



Evolution is necessary for life because it allows plants and animals to adapt to and survive changes that occur over time in their environment (habitat). How these adaptations are made is more a matter of error and trial, not trial and error. Cellular mutations or genetic accidents (errors) that occur can produce new traits or characteristics in an organism. Organisms that develop a new trait that allows them to deal with subsequent changes (trials) in growing conditions within their habitat are better suited to adapt and survive the changes. Such adaptations allow organisms to survive in a niche while others without those traits cannot.

Bromeliads are almost unmatched among plants for living in habitats that require drought tolerance and dependence on alternative and often scarce supplies of key nutrients. And this is what makes them useful for demonstrating plant adaptations. The focus of David's talk was to refute four common misconceptions about evolution and he used examples of bromeliads to make those points, as follows.

1. It is not true that newer, more complex species displace older 'primitive' species. For example, the picture on the right shows *Vriesea* growing beside a primitive plant form, a lycophyte (clubmoss). The genus *Vriesea* is no more than a few million years old and the lycophyte in the picture is essentially the same as its

ancestors that lived more than 300 million years ago.

2. It is not true that characteristics or adaptations never evolve more than once. The leafy tanks of bromeliads have evolved repeatedly throughout their evolution.
3. It is not true that evolution always progresses from simple to more complex forms or structures and from less to more efficient functions. Tillandsias have minimized form and function by developing harder, fewer leaves, minimizing shoots, and being essentially rootless. These traits give them an advantage in stressful habitats. Tillandsias are the most successful in the family Bromeliaceae in adapting to a wide range of habitats.
4. It is not true that major changes in form and function require millions of years. Evolution does not always proceed in small steps and in some plants, such as bromeliads, different aspects of its body evolve at different rates.



Wendy Searles, Martha and Bernard Fischer

In March, Steve and I went to Perth, Australia and then to New Zealand. We had met Bernard Fischer from Australia at a Bromeliad Conference in Orlando. We arranged to visit him in Perth. He took us to the home of Wendy and Bob Searles. After Perth, we visited New Zealand. Our last stop in New Zealand was the “Cool

Broms” Conference in Auckland. We saw several people there from the U.S.: Linda Sheetz, editor of the Florida West Coast Bromeliad Society and her husband, Michael Kiehl of Michael’s Bromeliads and his wife, Linda and Dennis Cathcart of Tropiflora and several others. We saw many people that we have seen at BSI conferences from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and a few other places. It is nice to see old friends and also make new ones and to share in our passion for bromeliads. They had a wonderful Conference. Steve and I will be sharing pictures from these in our Newsletters. We will also do a program on our trip in

July & August.

One of the Gardens, we visited was Peter Waters. We would say his place is supersaturated with Bromeliads. This reminded me of an article in the May, 2008 GNOBS, Potpourri Newsletter by Charles Birdsong.



Peter Waters in foreground

How Many Plants Are Too Much? By Charles Birdsong

I was once told you have too many plants when your wife can no longer water them for you. My darling bride of 41 years found me well past that point many, many years ago. She stays inside with her needlework and I stay outside with my bromeliads



Wendy and Bob Searles Rainbow Room in Australia

Over the last 32 years my collection has steadily increased. I still procure new plants each year but I'm more selective. I've seen collectors who don't add plants and think the hobby has become stale. I, on the other hand, add new hybrids and species of particular interest to me. I especially appreciate purple plants and small Neoregelias as well as Billbergias.

We bromeliad growers are both blessed and cursed with plants that tend to be prolific and furnish us with many pups. This asexual reproduction assures us of duplicates that are generally just like the mother plant. So in addition to the original plant we have now several destined to be just like it.

In the spring of 2007, I did my first comprehensive inventory of all my bromeliads. My collection has grown to its largest number ever. Last spring, I had 4,763 bromeliads consisting of 1,179 different species and hybrids representing 29 genera. I also have 14 bigeneric combinations. I readily admit this is



One corner of the “Rainbow Room”

too many for my space and needs. These plants are contained in my 77' X 90' foot backyard. They co-exist with a 12' X 12' shed under a large water oak, a smaller willow oak and a storm damaged silver maple I removed in the fall. Most of the space, not under trees, is covered by 55% shade cloth. In our area one builds as many greenhouses and temporary winter protection shelters as space allow. Many plants can survive if given protection from frost by trees in leaf, shade cloth or freeze protection cloth. Other plants that are just too tropical will succumb to temperatures below 40 degrees and certainly below 32 degrees. One must be selective and protect those that are tender. For most of the year shade cloth protection from the direct afternoon sun allows for growth and beauty.

As to the question, how did I end up with so many plants, quite simply I tend to remove pups when they are of proper size. This leaves me with many pups of the most prolific plants. If any life is left in the mother after pups are removed I set her aside and hope for more. This tends to add many duplicates when one or two are enough. My collection is limited by space and even more by winter.

I find that the best thing for me to do when potting is to classify my plants in one of four categories:

1. New hybrids or species that tend to be rare in collections.
2. Plants with special personal significance (favorite color, past show winners, gifts from friends, parents of favorite hybrids).
- 3 Prolific older plants that have been around a long time.
4. Plants that have just shown up or have been obtained from raffles or gifts from others who wanted them rescued.

When pups are present here is a way to keep the collection only slightly out of control. If the plant is in category 3 or 4 then take the healthiest pup and throw out the mother plant or take it to your local Society as a gift or raffle donation. If the plant is in category 2 then take two pups and dispose of the mother plant as above. If the plant is in category 1 keep all the pups you can for sale, trade, or to give others for their collection. This program assumes the mother plant has bloomed. If not, then I mark the label with notation of pup removal and put her back in a place of honor to await blooming.



Bob Searles

An article in the March, 2013, Bromeliana, the New York Bromeliad Society Newsletter had some suggestions on putting plants outside in containers. Make sure that the temperature will not be getting too cold at night for them.

BROMELIADS ARE INDESTRUCTIBLE CONTAINER PLANTS

by Cynthia Percarpio

In the last several years, I have acquired a number of bromeliads which have grown quite beautifully. My favorites tend to be the large urn shaped varieties with colorful spotted or margined leaves. Unfortunately, since I do not live in a mansion, my space is limited.

I bring a number of them to work in the winter and the remainder find their way into various nooks of my home. Last spring/summer I made use of my lovely



Vriesea 'Sunset' and variegated ivy
From Bromeliana

collection by incorporating the larger urn shaped varieties into container arrangements. In the past, I've often bought expensive annuals from the garden center, and this year I wanted to try something new and more economical.

When I bring the plants outside for the first time, I place them in a very shady location for a minimum of three days. Appropriate locations that I've used include a shady porch or under a table that is in the shade. I made the mistake of putting a *Vriesea gigantea* into direct sun after only 24 hours and sadly, it got a severe sunburn, dried up and died because I did not water it in time.

My front and back yards get good light but are mostly shady with a few areas of direct sun. To make a decorative container, I use an inverted plastic pot to build up the bottom. Then I fill the container with styrofoam peanuts and/or soil and sink the plant (which is usually in a plastic pot) into the container and add the annual or perennial. This way, at the end of the season I can take them out quickly and simply wipe down the pots. Many of my plants that are in basic green pots are put in decorative pots when displayed in my home or workplace.

Each of my lovely broms was featured as the focal point of a container arrangement. Some annuals were purchased to balance the displays. Variegated ivy worked nicely with most broms, as shown in the adjacent photo of *Vriesea* 'Sunset' that was placed in a spot where it got only early morning sun and good light. I also utilized orange hybrid begonias with lovely large double blooms.

One pleasing benefit from placing my collection outdoors is the enhanced colors which result. Although I have a fair amount of sun in my windows, (I do not use florescent lights), the plants never fully color up until they are outside. It is a wonderful surprise to see the array of beautiful patterns and colors that are enhanced by outdoor light and moving air.

One arrangement started with a fern as the focal point which worked out very well in the wet spring. Unfortunately, the summer became quite dry and the fern shriveled up after one missed watering. It was replaced with a sturdy *Aechmea* 'Morgana', a gift I had received from Herb Plever a year or two ago. In good light this plant grows rapidly, but with a compact shape.

In our spring plant sale 4 or 5 years ago I and many other members ordered tissue cultures of *Billbergia decora*. The plants were mislabeled and turned out to be

Billbergia 'Hallelujah' instead. This *Billbergia* stays mostly green indoors, but in the sunny outdoors it gets very red and spotted as shown in the photo of a few of its pups above left. This is a plant that needs strong light.

Aechmea 'Mend' (a cultivar of *Aechmea luedemania*) colors up beautifully in outdoor light, and is set off attractively with orange, double-blossomed hybrid begonias. I got this plant and the *Vriesea* 'Sunset' in our plant order; they were bought from Michael's Bromeliads and they are really strong growing broms.

Interestingly, by the fall, all of the flowering annuals that I had purchased were dead or very unattractive. The bromeliads, on the other hand, looked picture perfect!



Burned out *Vriesea gigantea* from Bromeliana



Aechmea 'Mend' with hybrid begonias
Also from Bromeliana



Unknown Aechmeas with Beauty
Oregano from Bromeliana



Billbergia 'Hallelujah'
from Bromeliana Newsletter

It was rather interesting to find a snake around the Bromeliads at the Searles place. . We were less than a meter away from this fellow. The Tiger snake is venomous and until recently, had the highest people count until the Brown snake took over. You might have heard about an Australian Field Hockey player who died in the past two or three weeks.

Bromeliad lovers don't hurt other Bromeliad lovers!



Australian Tiger Snake with the Bromeliads at
Wendy and Bob Searles place.

