



BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF GREATER CHICAGO

THE BSGC NEWS

August, 2009

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<http://bromeliad-chicago.org>

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Lori Weigerding

Our next meeting is Sept. 13th in Annex 1 at the Botanic Garden. There will be raffle tickets for sale for a few cryptanthus. We will also have the financial results of the show available. We will have a short discussion of ideas for next year's show and meetings. We will take a tram ride of the garden afterward.

President's Column

Well we made it thru another show and thanx to you all it was a great success. Ardie and Jack bless you again for all you do to make our shows a success! I know that it's not easy bringing all those plants and the travel alone is difficult! I hope you did enjoy yourselves while you were up here! Steve & Martha, Priscilla, Paula, Patsy and Henry, you all made great and abundant entries into the show! We certainly had a wide variety of plants and displays to entice people and to educate them! We had a lot of people ask questions about mounting; and how and where to put the tillandsias. I hope that we addicted several of them and that they'll be interested in joining our group. I haven't heard anything about the goings on at Patsy and Henry house, but I hope everyone who was able to go had a great time! They have such a wide variety of rocks and minerals and they're all very interesting.

Our next meeting is on September 13, 2009 at 2 PM in the Annex 1 trailer. Look forward to seeing you there!

Lori Weigerding



The Unknown Bride
With a Tillandsia

We had a nice show. We want to welcome our new society member J.P. Trunk who joined our Society at the show. The Botanic Garden librarian, Leora Siegel, came to our show and requested that we mail a copy of our newsletter to them. We had one day with nice weather and one that looked like rain so attendance was down on that day. We want to thank all the people who helped with the show. Those who helped were Del Busczynski, Maureen Collins, Paula Dering, Martha and Steve Goode, Jack and Ardie Reilly, Henry and Patsy Schmidt, Priscilla Segel, and Lori and Jeff Weigerding. We had a larger display of tillandsias than in the past. One of the questions asked was, “How do I get my *Aechmea fasciata* to bloom?” It is one plant that

many of us have waited years to get it to bloom. The Caloosahatchee’s August Newsletter had an article on Aechmeas. It said...

“This grouping of *Aechmea fasciata* has been growing in a portion SW Florida which is prone to several freezes in the high 20's each year. They are grown hard with no added fertilizer and little water during the winter. Nevertheless, the urn shap of each plant is ideal and each year they never fail to give an explosion of color via their inflorescences.”

If you would like to read the entire newsletter go to www.fcbs.org and click onto Member Societies, then go to the Caloosahatchee spot and click on the August newsletter. The *Aechmea* article is about half way through the newsletter.

At the July 12th meeting, we discussed participating at Navy Pier next year. Maureen Collins moved that we not participate. Paula Dering seconded the motion. The motion passed so our only sale that is scheduled is the one at the Botanic Garden. We are in discussion with the Cactus Society to do the Show and Sale with them. Gerry Gersey agreed to talk with the Garden to see if they would be willing to co-sponsor a program and help with some of the financial responsibility. Another idea was to investigate if the Orchid Society would be interested in doing a joint meeting with a speaker.

Since there were many tillandsia at our show and the majority of the plants we sold were tillandsia, I include the following article from the Florida East Coast Bromeliad Society’s June newsletter.



‘And they called it “Puppy Luv”!’

“A Return to Basics”



Till. Durati
“A Praying Tillandsia”?

This month’s installment focusses on the ‘T’s’ of the bromeliad world - the Genus *Tillandsia*. Some years ago I was asked to speak to a local garden club about bromeliads and I was both shocked and amused to learn that the club had taken on the name of "Tillandsia Garden Club", but had no idea where the word "Tillandsia" came from. When I began to describe some of the plants in this group, they seemed lost - until I mentioned the phrase "*air plants*" and, at that point they

all knew what I was talking about - so this may be a good starting point for discussion. When an obscure (at least at the time) group of plants was discovered that grew on and were supported only by tree branches, it was only natural for someone to conclude that these plants didn’t need any nourishment - including water. In fact, many of the horticulturists felt that water should be kept from Tillandsias. The name of the Genus came from Linnaeus, apparently a man with a sense of humor since he used the name of Elias Tillands, a Swedish botanist best remembered for his irrational fear of water!

The Tillandsia group is a very large Genus containing well over 500 species and an ever increasing number of hybrids – both naturally occurring and man-made. Despite their nickname of "air plants", this group includes plants that are terrestrial in nature as well as those that grow in trees(the epiphytes), on rocks and on sheer cliff faces(saxicolous). Some species never develop roots and cling to tree limbs with their thin, curly leaves while others may form massive root systems and be extremely difficult to move once established.

Interestingly enough, the Genus Tillandsia has the greatest number of species that have fragrant blooms among the bromeliads - an unusual characteristic for a bromeliad and one, no doubt developed to lure appropriate pollinators to the flowers. Flowers on some species such as *T. duratii* and *T. streptocarpa* are extremely fragrant, particularly at certain times of the day. More typically however, Tillandsia



Neo. ‘Red Tiger’
Jack Reilly

flowers are tubular, odorless and often of a purple color. Following the blooming period a seed capsule develops that slowly matures over a time period lasting up to one year. Eventually, the capsule splits into three sections and parachute-type seeds are released to be carried by the wind to a landing site, where given favorable conditions, the seeds germinate and produce a new generation of plants.

Tillandsias are found in areas covering the widest range of any bromeliads. Varieties are found at elevations ranging from sea level to over 2 miles above sea level. Some Tillandsias call southern Argentina home and some reside as far north as Virginia, but the majority are native to those regions in between. Sizes may vary from less than an inch to over 12 feet in height. With their occurrence over such a wide range of habitat and climate goes a broad range of tolerances for adverse growing conditions and this is part of the appeal and mystique of Tillandsias. You would expect that any plant that can survive such harsh conditions would thrive under all but the poorest care by the bromeliad hobbyist and, in many cases that is true. Unfortunately our altitude, or lack of it in Florida makes the successful culture of some of the higher altitude Tillandsia species problematic at best and, at times, simply not possible. Fortunately, there are so many varieties of Tillandsias that respond very well to our growing conditions that this is not a serious hindrance to growing and enjoying this Genus.

Tillandsias are well represented in our state with at least 17 native varieties (depending on the way you count and differentiate species). It's often said that the Florida native Tillandsias are not as colorful as forms of the same species found in other countries and in some cases that may be true. It's definitely true in the case of Floridas native *Guzmania monostachia*, however. anyone who has traveled through South Florida and seen tree limbs covered with *T. fasciculata* in bloom or come across colonies of *T. flexuosa* would probably argue this point for the other species.

What Tillandsias should the hobbyist consider adding to his or her collection? First, I would follow the advice Carol Johnson of Pineapple Place used to offer - as a beginner, start by growing bromeliads that are found in areas that have climates similar to your own. Avoid the high altitude plants and the extreme xerophytes – were just too low and too wet to please these types and you will drive yourself crazy trying to keep them alive. Start with the plants that you are most likely to have success growing!



Closeup of flower
Photo by Shigeko Matsuse
www.fcbs.org

Many of the commonly available small plants like *T. stricta*, *T. aeranthos*, and *T. fasciculata* are very easy to grow and reward you with a great bloom. And don't forget the many varieties of *T. ionantha*! Many view these little plants as absolutely charming and can't get enough of them. Expand on your successes – next you may want to try growing *T. xerographica*. This is very slow growing and relatively cold sensitive, so it will need protecting in the winter in our area, but the bloom is outstanding and extremely long lasting. From here you may want to try some of the hardier soft leaved varieties like *T. leiboldiana*. These plants are in bloom right now and they are quite easy to grow despite their delicate appearance. A few successes and you'll soon be "hooked" on Tillandsias - though this is somewhat of a poor word choice since Tillandsias, like their close relatives the Vrieseas (more on these in the next installment) are spineless – now what's not to like about these plants?!



Tillandsia Wreath

Many pictures of the tillandsias we sold from Russells can be found in Paul Isley's book Tillandsia which we have in our library. You can check it out and learn more about the tillandsia genus. The March-April issue of the BSI said that his new book Tillandsia II will be available this fall.



Crypt. Rick Richtmyer



Crypt. Quilt made by Michael Young
owned by Ardie Reilly
And now we put this issue to bed!

