

BROMELIANA

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CHESTER SKOTAK'S NEW MINIATURE HYBRIDS

by Herb Plever

Chester Skotak has earned world renown as an outstanding and most prolific hybridizer of bromeliads. For many years he has lived and worked in a huge mountain area of Costa Rica outside of San Jose that was a former coffee plantation. He has a fertile and restless mind and imagination and a great nose for selecting bromel characters to create strong, beautiful plants. He has worked with many bromel genera and bigenerics, and he looks to create compact and light sensitive plants that most bromeliad enthusiasts can grow. He grows an astronomical number of plants and seedlings

In his recent hybridizing Chester has been producing miniature neoregelias and pineapples, and he is now working on creating mini guzmanias. At the 2010 World Conference in New Orleans, Eloise Beach displayed a number of Chester's new miniature neoregelia hybrids. These are true minis that range from 4 to 8 inches tall and 5 to 10 inches wide! I don't have much information at this time about the guzmanias. One of the miniature pineapples was shown recently by Deroose Plants at the Tropical Plant Industry Exhibition in Ft. Lauderdale, FL and got the "Cool Plant Award". (See photo on pg. 3.) You can see why from the photo on this page; this miniature plant has fruited five small pineapples that Chester says were sweet and delicious.



Chester Skotak showing his new miniature edible pineapple with 5 small fruits.

The neo miniatures are all complex hybrids; they are the results of a number of crosses, selections and recrosses from an original hybrid or hybrids. In later stages of the crosses, a new parent may be added to the mix because it has special characters that Chester wants to be transferred to the progeny.

Of course, at this time Chester has not released information on the parentage of the new plants. When a hybridizer has developed a good hybrid with commercial potential, it is typical and understandable that he/she will protect the special formulas from the competition until the plant has been reproduced in quantity. Chester says he intends to register the minis with the B.S.I. Registrar, at which time the parentage will be revealed.

In 2008 I took a photo of an unregistered variegated cultivar of Chester's *Neoregelia* 'Hannibal Lector' that was labeled *N.* 'Kouchala'. It had broad white margins and also white longitudinal lines of varying thickness running along the length of the green leaves and red cross bands. These matched the markings on adjacent leaves to suggest the pattern on *N. concentrica* cv. 'Tiger', one of the parents of *N.* 'Hannibal Lector'. It is interesting to note (but likely coincidental) that more than a few of the new miniature neoregelias exhibit similar markings with the exception of the longitudinal white lines. (See the two photographs at the top of page

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, March 1st **at 7:30 PM** at Ripley Greer Studios, 520 Eighth Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets in room 16P on the 16th floor. **NOTE THE TIME CHANGE.** It was necessary because no rooms were available for the scheduled 6:30 pm time slot.

PUP CULTURE - How to remove and establish pups and appropriate potting media. Please bring in a plant with pups that can be removed or a recently removed pup and be prepared to talk about it.

two.)

'Hannibal Lector's' other parent was *N. ampullacea* cv. 'Rafa', a tiny plant whose few upright leaves have strong, dark purple bands. And some of the new minis display that dark banding on their undersides. (See photo of *N. 'Delirious'* on this page.)

Of course there are many other tiny neoregelias with similar banding that could be used to reduce the original parents to miniature sizes: neoregelias 'Tiger Cub', *lilliputiana*, 'Wee Willie', the red form of *N. punctatissima* (?) and others.

In addition to these plants, there are two hybrids made by Chester that may have been a part of the mini mix: (*Neoregelia carolinae* variegated x *N. 'Hannibal Lector'*) and *N. 'Morado'*. The former hybrid is variegated rather than consistently albomarginated with strong red markings, and I think of 'Morado' because of the consistent albomargination on all but two of the new minis.

The above suggestions are wild guesses that I hazard to make without evidence solely to give the reader an idea of the range of possibilities and the complexities of hybridizing - an art and a skill of great magnitude possessed by the good hybridizers. Nine of the miniature Neoregelias that were displayed at the 2010 World Conference in New Orleans are being grown by Eloise Beach for Chester at the Tropiflora nursery in Tallavast, Florida). You can see their photos and descriptions on line at tropiflora.com.

With the exception of two minis, all are albomarginated with varying degrees of purple to red broken cross-banding, spots and dots. *N. 'Palmares'* has green margins around a broad white longitudinal stripe and has purple markings. As you can see from the photo of *N. 'Delirious'*, its shorter and broader leaves also have green margins around broad or narrow white stripes (it is 6" high by 6" wide), but the undersides of the leaves are dramatically marked with dark purple bars reminiscent of *N. 'Rafa'*.



mini *Neoregelia* 'Blushing Zebra'
(photo by Eloise Beach)



mini *Neoregelia* 'Wild Rabbit'
(photo by Eloise Beach)



mini *Neoregelia* 'Delirious'
(photo by Dennis Cathcart)



mini *Neoregelia* 'Groucho'
(photo by Michael Kiehl)

quantities become available, the prices will undoubtedly drop.

Chester still has many mini neos that have not yet been released for distribution, two of which are shown at the top. The next batch of these plants will be shown at the 2012 World Bromeliad Conference in Orlando, Florida. Chester says these miniatures should be grown in filtered sun for best color and markings, but as always indoor growers will have to test each new cultivar in different light conditions to determine whether it will color up well indoors. I think they will do surprisingly well in a good east, certainly south and west window - and even close under fluorescent lights.

As Reginald Deroose has been growing some of Chester's pineapple minis, we hope that tissue cultures and fruiting plants may become available later. The guzmania hybridizing is still in progress. Indoor growers are eagerly looking forward to seeing Chester Skotak's new miniature hybrid guzmanias. Our collective experience with this genus has been very satisfactory. Guzmanias easily adapt to different indoor environments, and they flourish and produce blooms that stay in vivid color for many months.

In contrast to the Guzmanias, indoor grown Vrieseas are constantly attacked by spider mites even when the relative humidity is kept at decent levels. What we may consider a "decent" level of humidity (about 50%), is still a dry enough atmosphere for mites to thrive in. It is interesting that they mostly restrict their appetites to the soft, all-green leaved Vrieseas, and they

Michael's Bromeliads of Venice, Florida will have three of Chester's miniature neoregelias listed in its on line Spring Catalog, michaelsbromeliads.com. These are plants that were selected and named by Michael Kiehl in a previous visit to Chester's place in Costa Rica. They have been named *N. 'Zeppo'*, *N. 'Groucho'* (shown on this page) and *N. 'Harpo'*.

The available stock of Tropiflora's and Michael's miniatures is limited, so their prices are high. When greater

seem to ignore the soft-leaved, all green-leaved *Guzmanias* as well as *Vrieseas* with markings such as *V. fenestralis*. This is true even when plants of the two genera have their leaves intertwined (when I have too many plants bunched together). The fussy mites will ignore the *Guzmanias* and devour the *Vrieseas*.

To keep the beasties from sucking and chewing all the green chlorophyll from the leaves of my *Vrieseas*, I have to resort to a hateful and time-consuming regimen of spraying my *Vrieseas* with Safer's Soap and alcohol every few weeks. *Vrieseas* are found in low altitude, wet habitats with constant high humidity that our northern homes cannot readily supply without humidifiers.

Yet with the continuing freeze and snow we've had without a break since mid-November, I haven't had to spray at all, because my window-sill grown *Vrieseas* have no mites on them. The temperature at the window sills is always **cold** (the blower motors of my heating convectors are never turned on).



Paul & Annick Deroose and Reginald Deroose holding the award for a mini pineapple at TPIE.

Vriesea leaves are pushed against the ice-cold window panes. In the cold I can maintain the relative humidity at around 45%-50% with the aid of four humidifiers. Members who visited my home in January saw healthy *Vrieseas* with shiny, crisp leaves. What a strange anomaly - tropical *Vrieseas* that can flourish in cold temperatures because there are no spider mites around! What an

adaptable plant family is our *Bromeliaceae*.

However, when winter is here spring can't be far behind, and soon we'll have warmer weather (we hope). Then the mites will be back in force. If we could have a scientific explanation of the attraction of mites that is mostly limited to *Vriesea* leaves, perhaps solutions to the problem might be found. So here is a challenge to our expert biologists and hybridizers. Find out what is in *Vriesea* leaves that so attracts mites, and find what is in the leaves of other plants that repels them. Then the hybridizers can work to select and transfer the repellent character to new *Vriesea* minis. □

THE FUN AND HAZARDS OF COLLECTING

(This is an excerpt from brief secretarial notes printed in the Queensland Bromeliad Society Newsletter of a talk given by Bruce Dunstan at a recent meeting on his recent collecting trip to the El Cope area of Panama following the World Bromeliad Conference in July. The photo to the right was taken on that trip. It was sent to me by Peter Tristram. It is an appropriate followup to the foregoing article on Chester Skotak's hybrids. The headline is my own creation. Editor)

"BRUCE DUNSTAN spoke about and showed slides of his recent trip to Panama. My notes cannot compare to viewing his slides for the colour and size of the inflorescences. Some of these plants have only been seen in the wild by approximately 10 people and Bruce is the first Aussie, what a privilege. We were shown a map of the forest coastline that still has vast areas that have not been discovered. Bruce had on display 3 different clones of *Guzmania* 'Fortuna'.



Chester and Peter in Panama

Other people on this trip with Bruce were Carla Black, Bill Fity, Peter Tristram, Chester Skotak and Mark Paul. Chester has 3 people in his employ whose sole job is to daily pollinate species and to cross pollinate for breeding....photo of Peter climbing trees to see if any viable seed on plants.

“During the wet season there are clear mornings, then by midday the heavy mists would come down so umbrellas are used against the heavy rains...

“Columnea with yellow flowers growing up into the trees.... great photos of a black Cyclanth (looked a bit like a Cycad) and a variegated form of *Rhoeo cochliostema* growing to 1 metre across. I must not forget the photo of the very large ‘fer de lance’ snake next to the walk trail with Bruce trying to tell/yell at the group coming along the track: “SNAKE SNAKE”, but they were busy chatting...finally catching their attention...but the smaller snakes were more venomous.

The group kept crossing back and forth seeking different plants suitable for growing in pots. *Guzmania lingulata* which had lots of pollen, so encouraging the



Guzmania sanguinea v. brevipedicellata

beautiful birds to visit for the pollen.....*Tillandsia fasciculata* ‘Magnifica’ high up in trees, so many they fall off and lay on the side of the road...Trucks passing with loads of bananas. They also wandered into a citrus grove and the *Guzmania sanguinea* were like glowing lights. So many variations and growth...Pitcairnia throughout the forest with their inflorescences hanging down, and the beautiful hummingbirds yipping in and out, tasting and collecting the pollen.

“Some of these plants were 1 metre plus tall, but might not grow here...*Vriesea monstrum* 18” long inflorescence. *Racinaea* very bright and strong...grows high up. *Tillandsia anceps* and *T. monodelpha* quite common throughout Panama. Orchids growing everywhere and some of these even fall out of trees. Geckos, spiders, poison arrow frogs, caterpillars and turtles that loved eating the frogs eggs in the puddles. The Heliconias, many different types, colours and sizes of the flowers. They found 2 new species in the space of 2 hours... An ornamental shrub related to the *Ixora* family, had a flower the size of a basket ball.” □

N E W S and N O T E S

MIMI’S BILLBERGIA - Derek Butcher suggests via email that Mimi’s unlabeled billbergia shown in the February Bromeliana is *Billbergia distachya var. straussiana*. I had thought of that plant at first, but the solid patch of pale blue on the inner leaf apex in Mimi’s closeup was different from the taxonomic description of spots of indigo, and I hesitated to take the plunge. But Uncle Derek says the plants are very variable; we can depend on his sharp eyes and nose in these matters.

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY MEETINGS have been cancelled by decision of the members at the January meeting. We have always had cold weather in January and February, but this decision was made because of the typical nasty wintry weather we have come to expect in those months in the present period of climate change. Recall the snow, ice and sleet storm

we had on the scheduled meeting date this past February 1st, and it is evident that decision was wise. **SLOW RELEASE FERTILIZER** pellets will be delivered at the March meeting. This is a Dynamite product with an NPK formula of 10-10-17 for Bromeliads and Orchids. The pellets are a type of nutricote slow release that last for 9 months.

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