

BROMELIANA

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WHERE HAVE ALL THE VRIESEA SPLENDENS GONE?

By Herb Plever

In 1961 the first two bromeliads that I bought from Ed Hummel were *Vriesea splendens* and *Aechmea fasciata*. They were the most widely grown broms at the time. Hummel's *splendens* had shorter, wider leaves and it was probably a cultivar known as *Vriesea* 'Cayenne', similar or the same as the cultivar *V.* 'Hera' referred to below.

Early on *V. splendens* (Brongniart) Lemaire was called *splendens major*, but with Dr. Lyman B. Smith's monologue of the *Bromeliaceae* it has been designated as *var. splendens*. Four varieties of the type species *V. splendens* are recognized: *var. striatifolia* M.B. Foster, *var. formosa* Suringar ex Witte, *var. oinochroma* Steyermark and *var. chlorostachya* Oliva-Esteve. But except for *var. formosa*, these varieties are all drab with green spikes and have no ornamental value. *Var. formosa* is like the type *Vriesea splendens var. splendens*, except that it has all green leaves with no markings, and the lower bracts are yellow. (See photo on page 3.)

With its brilliant sword-like spike and its



Vriesea splendens var. splendens in habitat.
Photo by Francisco Oliva-Esteve

dramatically marked leaves, *V. splendens* was popular with growers and was found in most collections. The inflorescence became known as a "flaming sword", after Walter Richter's 1937 cultivar *V.* 'Flammendes Schwert' [(*V. splendens var. formosa* x *V. splendens var. splendens*) x (*V. splendens var. splendens*)]. (See photo on page 3.)

With this cross Richter managed to retain the *splendens* barring (see photo on page 2), and an inflorescence similar to but longer than that

of *var. formosa* which has green leaves. It is said the spikes of the two are the same, but I believe *formosa*'s spike is shorter and broader and its lower bracts are yellow. (See photo on page 2.) Richter also crossed *V.* 'Flammendes Schwert' x *V. splendens v. splendens* and got a longer spike that he called *V.* 'Illustris'.

Vriesea splendens and its varieties are found in Venezuela, Trinidad, Tobago and Guiana. It grows at altitudes of from 1,000 ft. to 4,000 ft. in forests and on rocks as a terrestrial, a saxicole and an epiphyte.

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, May 1st, 2012 **promptly at 7:00 P.M.** at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16N](#)

THE PLANTS YOU ORDERED - We'll display each plant that was ordered and will discuss where and how to grow them and potential problems with members who have grown them before. We'll have two new fertilizers, (25-20-51) and (5-12-26) for sale at the meeting. Please bring in plants for sale and for Show and Tell.

Reminder: you must pick up the plants you ordered at this meeting!

It has adapted to such a wide range of environments in habitat that it also readily adapts in cultivation to be grown in shade houses, greenhouses and the indoors. It grew well in my east-south-east window, also set back from my south windows as well as under fluorescent lights.

Vriesea splendens was a popular favorite among bromeliad growers internationally. Some really beautiful cultivars were made that for a time were widely grown in Europe and America. The Bak Nursery in the Netherlands made a nice cultivar they called *V. 'Splenriet'* and a really small *splendens* they called *V. 'Fire'*. Many of us in New York happily grew 'Fire' on our windowsills. Hans Gulz in Germany made a compact form of *V. 'Cayenne'* he called *V. 'Hera'*.

Nat DeLeon in Florida made an attractive similar cultivar he called *V. 'Juno'* and DeMeyer in Belgium made a similar cultivar called *V. 'Meyer's Favorite'* that were widely grown in Europe - less so in America. Some years later the Exotic Plant nursery in Belgium made a beautiful cultivar called *Vriesea 'Favoriet'*. I note that Luc Peters of Exotic Plant is



Vriesea 'Fire'



Vriesea 'Splenriet'

still a BSI member. (Caroline DeMeyer may have been the hybridizer.)

So, in the spirit of Pete Seeger's song, "Where Have All The Flowers Gone", I have asked the rhetorical question: Where have all the *Vriesea splendens* (and its beautiful cultivars) gone?

Today you cannot buy it for love or money. Neither *V. splendens* nor any of its cultivars except for *V. 'Splenriet'* is offered in any of the few remaining bromeliad nurseries. (It was included in our current plant order.)

Now that blooming bromeliads are often seen at good prices in places like Home Depot, Costco, Trader Joe's and many supermarket chains, bromeliad nurseries are missing out on the great commercial potential of *Vriesea splendens* and its beautiful cultivars.

One impediment to mass production is its cost, especially today. Then there is the problem with vegetative production, since *V. splendens* is an upper-popper that produces only one upper pup. So resort must be had to seed production and tissue culture.



Vriesea 'Hera'



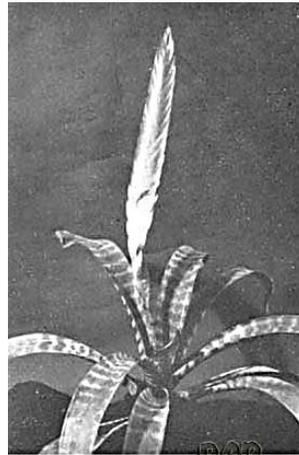
Vriesea 'Favoriet'



Vriesea 'Juno'

I am convinced that such production can be profitable to producers, and it will attract the public to bromeliads. I urge those hybridizers and the tissue culturist Reginald Deroose to consider mass producing *Vriesea splendens* and reviving V. 'Fire' (Peter Bak), V. 'Juno' (Nat DeLeon) and V. 'Favoriet' (Exotic Plant). The talented Chester Skotak is especially equipped to undertake production, since he grows millions of broms without the burden of the costs of heating and cooling in his low mountain spread in Costa Rica.

If this work could be undertaken then the answer to the rhetorical question will not be "...gone to graveyards everyone..."



V. 'Flammendes Schwert'



Vriesea splendens v. *formosa*
(photo taken at Selby Gardens)

THOUGHTS FROM A COUPLE OF NOT SO NEWBIES

by Vee and Ray Clark

(Reprinted from the February 2012 issue of the S.A. Gazette, South Australia B.S.)

My wife and I have always been collectors of plants. In the past it has been mainly ornamental conifers and Bonsai. When we moved to Adelaide, these cold weather lovers did not travel with us and the Bonsai took too long to get a result.

And so it turned out that my wife started to collect Bromeliads. First there were "living air plants" and then all sorts of other bright and sometimes outrageously coloured plants. At first my involvement was limited to how to fix these little plants to bits of timber. And where can we put a shelf for these plants, and can you make something to hang this on!?

Then I started to take an interest in these peculiar little plants called tillandsias! Here started the problem! I'm told it's like many forms of addiction, one is too many, and a thousand is not enough!!!!

At first, it's a bit like John Catlan describes it in his book *Under the Mango Tree*: you're happy to collect almost anything, you don't have a wish list. They are all great! And then quietly but very, very surely the obsession begins.

Firstly we managed to fill an 8 metre by 4 metre pergola, then there were more shelves and then some hanging rails and then we needed a shade house. The shade house is 12 metres long & can easily accommodate 2000 plants. (We're already planning how to expand along the next fence with more shelving!) Now we have entered what Mr. Catlan calls objects of our desires.

But wait, there's more, the Crypts have a de-

mountable hot house for winter. It's heated, via a digitally controlled fan heater, which also allows us to buy in pups from Queensland in the middle of winter and they don't go into shock.

The questions, the endless questions: how do I grow this, what do I do about that. The answers are almost the same; you largely work it out as you go. It takes a while to believe the advice that yes, you are the best person to judge the environment that you share with your plants.

One of the better aspects of the Brom world, are the great people that we are starting to meet, I suppose it helps when you have a common addiction! Where do we go from here? Who knows, the direction of the collection is continually evolving, we are merely passengers on the journey of the Brom!

(Editor's note: Vee and Ray Clark clearly have lots of space and funds to allow their "obsession" to take off. In New York we are always squeezed for space, but our obsessions are like the Clark's: we always feel compelled to acquire more plants than our apartments can accommodate. After each new plant order we still manage to find room for the new plants we couldn't resist ordering, and room for the new pups we've been avoiding potting up until Spring.) □

NEWS and NOTES

FERTILIZER - In the April issue of Bromeliana I reported about using a low nitrogen formula of 5-11-26 for Aechmea 'Tim Plowman' to grow it more slowly and compactly. I ran out of that fertilizer and ordered one from Peters, now 5-12-26. It has all the necessary micro nutrients and magnesium sulfate, so we don't have to add epsom salts to our pitchers.

I bought that fertilizer because I needed it to make a new all-purpose bromel fertilizer. I mix it with the new Peters Peat Lite Special (18-7-17) and 20-2-20 to make a formula of 25-20-51. I've been trying to make one with the potassium double the nitrogen for some time.

After the presentation of the plant order video at the April meeting, we had an informative and useful discussion about our experiences with the mini Guzmania tissue cultures we had bought in previous years. Barbara Lagow reported on flowering Guzmania 'mini Elien' she had purchased as a tissue culture a few years ago. She said that the bloom was beautiful, but complained that the plant was not at all a mini size. It was about 15"-16" across. Barbara suggested that perhaps this was due to her use of frequent, high strength fertilizer.



Guzmania 'mini Elien'

I have had the same experience with the mini guzmanias I've bought; they all are larger than mini size when they flower. I agreed that our fertilizer regimen might be a factor and suggested that we switch to using the low nitrogen formula I had just acquired.

In truth, now that I write about this, my ancient memory cells have been stimulated to recall a conversation with Len Trevor at the 2008 World Bromeliad Conference in Cairns, Australia. Len runs the famous Olive Branch Bromeliad Nursery in Brisbane, Australia with his wife Olive, and he told me that they were using the low nitrogen 5-11-26 fertilizer on their guzmanias and some neoregelias.

When I got back from Australia, I bought Peters 5-11-26 to use it in making a fertilizer, but I seem to have forgotten about using it straight for Guzmanias. I have started now to use it on my many guzmanias, but especially on the new plants from my mini guzmanias, to see if it results in more compact growth with shorter leaves at flowering time.

The low nitrogen fertilizer and the all purpose mix will be available at the May meeting. I suggest you buy both of them and start your own tests. Now that we are entering the higher light warm season, I recommend you use 1/2 tsp. fertilizer to a gallon of water, every one to two weeks. If you are growing some mini guzmanias, test the use of the low nitrogen formula so you can report the results at a fall meeting.

REMINDER - You must pick up your plant order at the May meeting. We are not able to store them for you. If you really can't attend the meeting, please arrange for someone to pick up the plants and hold them for you.

CAN SOMEONE IDENTIFY THIS AECHMEA?

The plant in the photo below came from the late Henry Turner who bought it in Hawaii many years ago . It is an easy grower with dark mahogany leaves with bright red longitudinal ribbon markings. It is an unknown, unlabeled hybrid. If any reader recognizes it, please advise.



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