

BROMELIANA

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(While perusing old issues of Bromeliana I realized how many good articles are reposing in archived obscurity. Many of them will be of interest to our relatively new membership, and I will reprint and augment them in coming issues. The late Sig Sussman was one of the founders of our Society in 1962; he served many terms as Treasurer and as President. The following from November 1976 - no color then - is one of many articles that Siggy wrote for Bromeliana. Ed.)

ANANAS 'Symbolicus'

by Sig Sussman

My interest in art always seems to be complemented by my fascination with Bromeliads. Recently, I was in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and attended a gallery talk on 18th Century English Rooms and the Decorative Arts being given by Mrs. Carolyn P. Cassilly in a beautiful dining room designed by Robert Adam (about 1760).

A large table was set as if for an elaborate and important dinner. The centerpiece was a pyramid of various fruits at whose apex was a pineapple. Mrs. Cassilly indicated that this type of centerpiece was used as a symbol of hospitality and wealth.

My curiosity was aroused and I asked Mrs. Cassilly where I could get further information about the pineapple in 18th Century England. She was kind enough to check her notes at home and told me of two magazine articles written by Jean Gorely, who was editor of the publication "Old Wedgwood", the annual periodical of the Wedgwood Club. In 1940



Carved wood staircase with pine cone "Pine Apple" on top. London, 1675

she wrote an article on "Pineapples as a Decorative Motif" and in July, 1945 she wrote on 'Pineapples' in the magazine "Antiques".

What follows is a brief history of the introduction of *Ananas comosus* into England. In 1555 a monk named Andre Thenet sent a specimen to Europe from the West Indies. The first pineapples to reach England were sent to Oliver Cromwell in 1657. Later, in 1668, King Charles II served pineapples at a royal banquet for the French Minister, Colbert. Due to the long trip from the West Indies to England the pineapples apparently had spoiled and the guests did not like their taste.

In 1755 Dr. Samuel Johnson gave the following explanation for the name: From before the middle ages and through the 15th century the pine cone was regularly used in designs and in heraldry, and it was popularly called the pine apple. Because of its resemblance to the pine cone, the fruit of

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, November 7th, 2017 **promptly** at 7:00 pm at the Ripley-Grier Studios, 520 - 8th Avenue (betw. 36th & 37th Ave) **Room 16M**.

PLANTS WITH GOLDEN BLOOMS appropriate for our continued Indian Summer/Autumn weather. Great photos of indoor-sized, beautiful broms with gold and yellow inflorescences, many of which will not be familiar to you. **Also:** We compare unlike siblings from the same seed batch (grex). Bring in some plants for sale and for Show and Tell.

the Ananas also came to be know as a "Pineapple".

In the middle of the 17th century a Mr. LeCour at Leyden, Holland showed how to grow Ananas under glass by installing a stove in the greenhouse to provide the heat required by this tropical plant. To this day warm greenhouses are called "stove houses".

In 1720 an Ananas comosus was grown, flowered and fruited in a pineapple stove house in Richmond, Surrey. This feat created such excitement that the Dutch painter Theodore Netscher, painted a picture of it. It hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England.

A pineapple was fruited in Scotland in 1732 in a "pine apple stove house" at an estate at Chrichton near Edinburgh. Interest in growing the Ananas became so intense that hothouses were designed specifically for growing pineapples. They were called "pinehouses" or "pineries", and erecting them became one of the pastimes of the wealthy .

Adam Taylor, in his "Treatise On The Ananas" in 1769, called the pineapple "The King of



Silver urn with pineapple on top cover. London, 1740

Fruits" and stated that the production of pineapples "has become the test of good gardening".

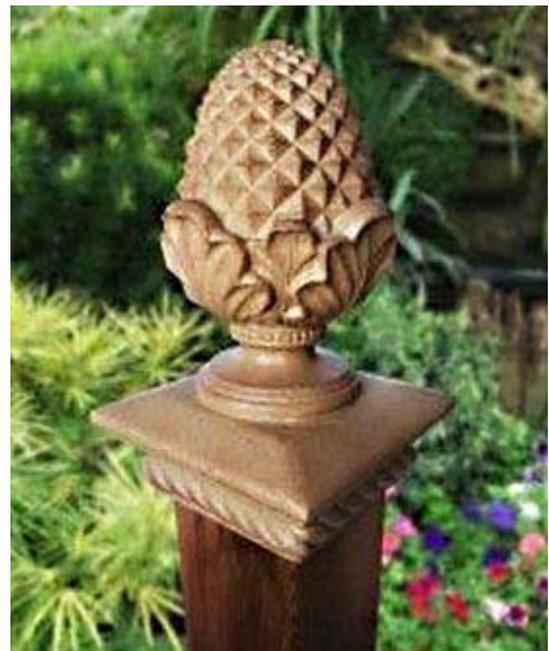
By this time the pineapple had become the rage of London aristocracy. Whenever an important dinner or banquet was given the "grand table" would have an elaborate centerpiece. This was usually a pyramid of mixed fruits and sweetmeats topped at the apex with a pineapple. It was either on a revolving platform of willow wood (our Lazy Susan) or on a silver epergne.

The guests would eat other fruits and goodies but would leave the pineapple untouched so it could be used to adorn another table. It was so expensive that no one would dare ask the butler to cut this fruit or he might

never be invited anywhere again. The pineapple was so rare and esteemed that if the host did not have one in fruit in his "pinery", he would rent one from some one who did. It became such a symbol of importance and wealth that a method of "candying" pineapples was developed to preserve them. It took the cooks so many changes of syrup that 10 weeks were required to complete the preserving process. It was evidently



Pineapple on door as welcome symbol



Carved wood pineapple on porch railing post

worth the trouble to have a pineapple last over a year.

As a very impressive gift, Voltaire in 1772 gave a pineapple to the Duchess of Northumberland when she came visit him. It was reported that in 1789 a banquet was given in Windsor Castle and that many pineapples were served on the tables. That was royal hospitality.

The popularity and prestige of the pineapple reached such heights that it influenced Josiah Wedgwood to produce a pineapple pattern for his ceramics, and a large quantity was produced between 1759 and 1764. By the end of the century it was firmly established as a decorative feature symbolizing wealth and hospitality. Pineapples were carved on furniture, mirrors, glassware, fabrics, silver urns, teapots, flatware and sugar bowls. The practice spread to the West Indies, the pineapple's original habitat, and to the United States where this symbol was carved on bedposts and chairs and over doorways.

In his play, "The Rivals", written in 1775, Sheridan had Mrs. Malaprop say: ". . .He was the pineapple of politeness." By then everyone knew that a pineapple was the pinnacle of the fruit world and the malapropism was readily understood.

By the middle of the 19th century, the symbolism of the pineapple was extended beyond mere hospitality. Hooper writes in "The Lady's Book" in 1841, that the gift of a pineapple between lovers signified "you are perfect".

I am sure that none of this interesting information will help you to grow the ananas successfully, but if anyone wants to rent a pineapple, just call me. Members of the New York Bromeliad Society will receive a 25% discount. □



Dunmore House - Scotland's 'Folly'

(Editor's note: Dunmore House shown in the photo below was built into the wall of a large garden in 1761 by John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore. It is still known as Scotland's folly and the most bizarre building in Scotland. A hothouse was built on the ground floor of the building for growing pineapples and other plants. The south facing ground floor now covered in stucco was originally covered with glass window panes. The carved, stone pineapple on top is 40 feet high.

Over the centuries the Dunmore estate and this building fell into ruins and was abandoned. One lot, called the "Pineapple Lot", included the folly and the large walled garden, along with some woodlands and a small lake. This lot was purchased by the Countess of Perth, and in 1974 was given to the National Trust for Scotland. The "Pineapple Lot" was then leased to the Landmark Trust, who restored the building.

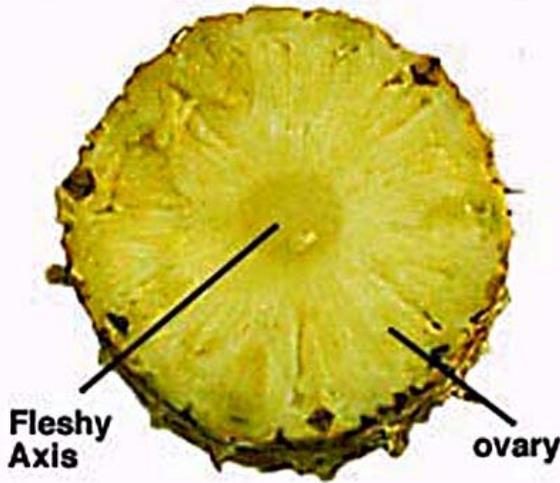
The edible pineapple we love to eat was classified as the species *Ananas comosus*, but it has now lost its genus status and become a cultivar called *Ananas* 'Comosus'. The reason for the change is that for 200 or more years this plant has been clonally selected and crossed and recrossed, and it is impossible to get an accurate description of the physical characters of the original plant.

The pineapple is a multiple fruit; each flower in the inflorescence produces a fruit, but these mature into a single mass in which each flower has produced a true fruit. After flowering the mass is called an infructescence. Examples are the fig, pineapple, mulberry, osage-orange, and breadfruit. Pineapple fruits frequently turn bright red during the flowering/fruiting process. □



Variegated *Ananas* 'Comosus' with multiple basal and apical offsets

Pineapple - Multiple Fruit



Over the past hundred years horticultural techniques for producing commercial pineapples have become more advanced. Pineapples are grown commercially in Hawaii, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico (before Hurricane Marie), Mexico, Brazil, Africa and Asia in open fields where they get a lot of direct sun.

This is necessary for the plants to rapidly mature, flower and produce large fruits. Pineapple plants can also get enough direct sun when they are grown in greenhouses, but they will not get enough light to flower naturally when grown indoors. If given enough strong indoor light pineapples grown indoors with a fertilizer regimen might be forced to bloom with the application of a chemical flower inducer. However, a mature pineapple plant is very large and takes up too much horizontal space to be considered by indoor growers.

When flowering plants are mature enough to bloom and arrive at their seasonal flowering time, they are programmed by their DNA to produce ethylene gas into their capillary systems which trigger certain enzymes that shut down leaf production in their meristems and initiate the production of inflorescence tissue. This process holds true for all species of flowering plants.

Commercial pineapple growers treat their plant crops with different chemical flower inducers that create ethylene gas molecules that are absorbed by the plants to initiate the flowering process. They do this when the plants are big enough to maximize

yield and product recovery.

This brings me to the subject of the “stove houses” described above. During the 17th century when wealthy owners of estates put wood-burning stoves to heat their glasshouses for the benefit of their tropical pineapple plants. This, they thought, was responsible for the occasional flowering they achieved. Little did they know that it was the smoke from the burning of the wood that caused the plants to set buds. One important chemical component of that smoke is ethylene gas.

Commercial growers have developed clones that are more compact (to be able to grow more pineapples), and easy to handle leaves without spines. They produce clones like the “Golden Pineapple” with fruit that consistently ripens sweet and juicy.

Some striking ornamental pineapple plants have been produced such as the variegated, spineless *Ananas* ‘Ivory Coast’ shown below.)



Ananas (comosus) ‘Ivory Coast’

SAVE December 20th for our holiday party!

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