S E M B S

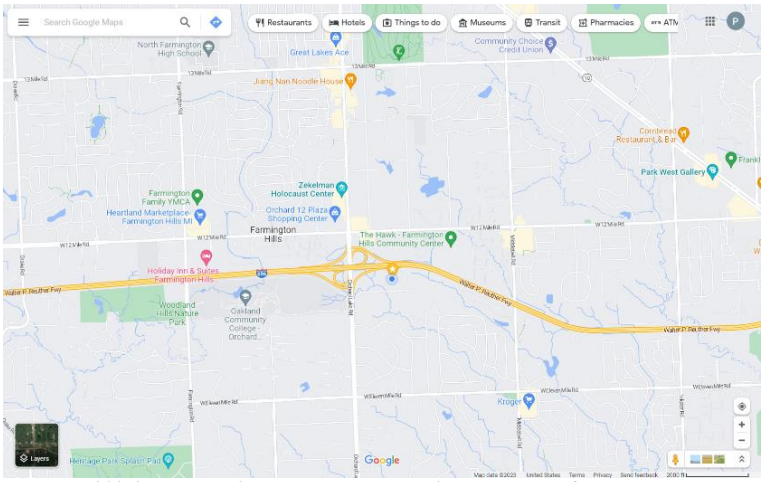
The Southeast Michigan Bromeliad Society

an Affiliate of the Bromeliad Society International

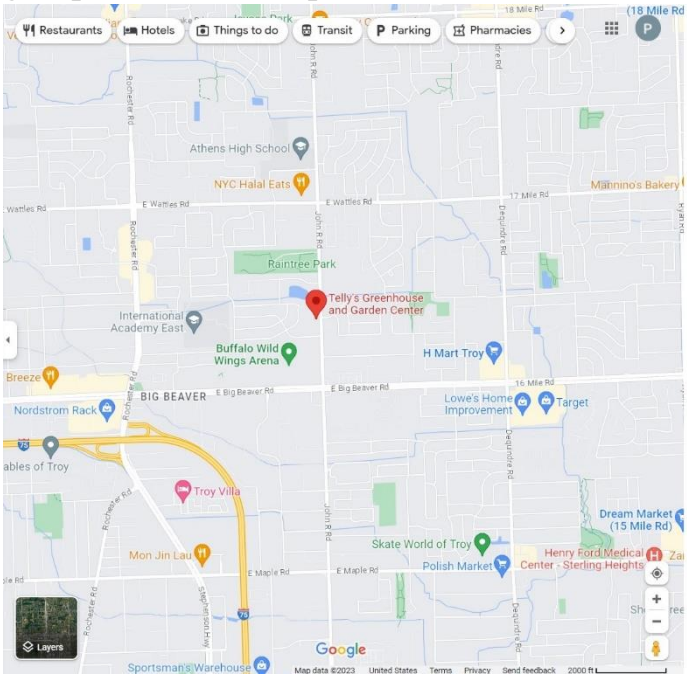
May/June 2023

Vriesea ‘Candy Stripe’- a variegated cultivar from Hawaiian bromeliad hybridizer David Fell enjoys our summer weather here in Michigan. Photo by Paul Wingert. The Vriesea “glyph group” will be the featured genus at the May meeting.

Upcoming calendar- The May meeting will be held on **Saturday, May 20, 2023**, at 2:00 PM at the home of Paul and Karen Wingert, 27276 Edgemoor, Farmington Hills, MI 48334. Please note that here is road construction on I-696. Weekend lane closures or ramp closures are always a possibility, so be mindful of traffic reports and consider using travel apps for alternate routes. While less convenient than the freeway, most of the surface streets should only add a few minutes to your travel time. If you need last-minute assistance, call Paul at 248-798-4139.



The long-range weather forecast for May 20 as of 5/8 was for rain showers. As of 5/10, it has been changed to mostly sunny and 70! Keep an eye on the forecast and pack an umbrella just in case the weather prognosticators get it wrong! We will be outdoors, except in case of thunderstorms or heavy rain. Bring a comfortable lawn chair for the meeting. The main agenda will be the distribution of the group orders that were placed. Packages will soon be arriving laden with Tillandsias from California, Vrieseas from Hawaii, and all sorts of goodies from Florida! For members who did not order plants, there is no obligation to buy anything. Should anyone change their mind, there are plenty of extra plants ordered that will be available. The featured genus for this month's meeting will be Vriesea, with a special focus on what the BSI Cultivar Registrar Geoff Lawn refers to as the "Glyph group". With the shipment of Vrieseas from David and Royanne Shiigi arriving, it is likely that this will be the greatest number of foliage type Vrieseas together at any time and any place in the state of Michigan!



The **June meeting** will be held on **Saturday, June 17, 2023,** at 2:00 P.M. at Telly's Greenhouse, 3301 John R Rd, Troy, MI 48083. Depending on temperature and sun, we will meet in the potting shed or the greenhouse north of the parking lot from the main greenhouse. The featured topic of the meeting will be the genus Neoregelia, with a particular focus on "Small and

Miniature Neoregelias". If you have plants to bring for "Show and Tell", we should be able to assemble a very fine display! We will also have the Raffle Table at this meeting.

Though there are only a handful of small and miniature Neoregelia species, literally thousands of hybrids and cultivars that have been created in the past 50 years. These plants are very popular with bromeliad growers all over the world. Because of their size, miniature Neoregelias offer the possibility of having a relatively large and diverse collection in a small space. They thrive outdoors in our Michigan summers. Most do well with protection from the mid-day and early afternoon sun, although the species Neoregelia 'Fireball' and its various cultivars can be acclimated to full sun. During the indoor growing season, a large, sunny window, or growing under LED lights will give the best results. The new LED lights are a real game changer! It is possible to maintain the same color intensity in the plants that they displayed during mid-summer, and by mimicking the daylength through the fall and winter months, it can help to initiate flowering in mature plants.

Neoregelia 'Chrissy' is a variegated sport of Neoregelia 'Cheers'

Transitioning Your Bromeliads Outside for a Summer's Vacation

-by Paul Wingert

One of the most common subjects of discussion at our society's public events relates to the ever-popular Aechmea fasciata, also known as the "Silver Vase" plant. Typically, it begins "I got this Silver Vase plant years ago, and I got pups, but they never bloom". Then ensues a discussion of the "apple with the plant in a bag" maneuver. This does work. For those who may be unfamiliar with the process, a ripe apple gives off ethylene gas, and when it is contained within the bag, it permeates the meristem of the bromeliad and signals that it is time to bloom. Commercial growers who raise thousands of plants are essentially doing the same thing. Plants are fed aggressively until they reach the desired size and then are chemically treated to initiate flowering. From that point, they know it is "x" number of days until the inflorescence is beginning to emerge and the finished product can be shipped to vendors around the country. Many other varieties of bromeliads are produced for the market in much the same way. This

"mechanization" of the floriculture industry allows bromeliad enthusiasts to find a broad assortment of varieties throughout the year and at reasonable prices!

Now, there is a natural alternative to getting bromeliads to bloom! Very simply, it involves moving the plants out of the house and placing them outdoors in a desirable location. Once again using the example of the Aechmea fasciata- mature, well-fed plants growing outdoors respond to natural triggers of fluctuating temperatures and day length. In my years of experience, inflorescences begin to emerge in mid to late July, and the first flowers can be expected to open within a few days of August 1.

Aechmea fasciata variegata sports blooms in August

There are two important considerations when acclimating our plants to outside conditions. The first is to provide sun protection for plants that have been in relatively low-light, interior conditions. There is nothing more disheartening than getting your plant successfully through the winter months, only to witness it getting fried to a crisp after a day or two of intense sunshine! Even if it's not the whole plant being burned, it seems like the leaves most greatly exposed to the hottest, mid-afternoon sun are most vulnerable to leaf scorching. While it likely will not kill your plant, the disfigurement may take months to outgrow, kind of defeating the purpose of the summer vacation outdoors! So, do take care when first placing them outdoors! A covered porch may offer a good starting point to begin acclimating plants outdoors. By the middle of May, the deciduous trees are normally pretty well leafed out and offer many more filtered shade options. My long-term solution has been the construction of a shade house. I use 40% shade cloth for overhead protection and 30% shade cloth for vertical "walls" around the south end of the structure. It gives me the confidence to move the plants outdoors with no fear of sunburn- as long as temperatures are warm enough! That brings us to the second, rather obvious consideration of adequate warmth.

Paul's Shade house in June

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The month of July features lots of flowering Neoregelias

Let's face it. It's May. We're in Michigan. Temperatures are notoriously volatile! And every year is different. This year brought an ominous start to May, with a daytime high of 43 on May 1 and a disturbing sight of snowflakes. However, the weather has quickly transitioned to a more typical spring-like setting. The average date of the final spring freeze locally is right around May 1. I begin moving more cold-tolerant bromeliads out as soon as possible after the last apparent freeze, starting with more cold-tolerant bromeliads such as Tillandsias, Dyckias, and bromeliads that grow at high elevation. Billbergias, Neoregelias, and Vrieseas follow shortly thereafter. Last to go out to the shade house (usually after May 15, but sometimes even a week after that) are plants from low altitude, low latitude distribution such as Aechmea chantinii, Ae. zebrina, Ae. tessmanii, and various Cryptanthus. In 40+ years of growing, I have not yet had any plants die as a result of a late spring freeze, though I have likely pushed the limits of good sense in some years! Once every 3 to 4 years on average, it seems that a mid-May frost is suddenly in the forecast, and out comes the frost cloth and the sheets for a night or two. The vast majority of the bromeliads appear to shrug off the experience unaffected by the brief chill. The most sensitive plants I have observed are various Orthophytum spp. and hybrids, and Hechtia lanata. The Orthophytums showed leaf damage when temperatures reached 35-38 degrees, even when covered with frost cloth. The only consolation is that the plants grow fast, so there was little evidence of damage by the end of summer. Hechtia lanata is another story altogether. It shows leaf damage at around 45 degrees. Fortunately, I haven't had damage to the growing point, but it is much slower to shed evidence of mistreatment! Even though it appears morphologically very similar to Dyckias, it is really a more tropical grower and needs to be treated as such.

Colors intensify in August's simmering heat.

There are risks to moving bromeliads outside for the summer, but these can be easily mitigated. Be sensible about exposing plants to the intense sun and make the transition to brighter conditions over a period of time! Avoiding a freeze is just common sense. Though many bromeliads will survive a brief period of freezing temperatures, it seems unnecessarily cruel to take the chance when you can possibly avoid it! The rewards of transitioning your bromeliads outside soon become evident. Plants respond to the increased air circulation and appear revitalized in a matter of days! Abundant natural light helps intensify the beautiful leaf colors. Throughout the summer, there are subtle differences in the intensity of coloration with the fluctuation of temperatures and day length. Finally, you should be able to witness an increasing number of bromeliads initiating blooming, and that brings additional satisfaction to your growing experience!

September's cooler night temperatures deepen colors even more!

Foliage Vrieseas- the "Glyph" group- by Paul Wingert

The genus Vriesea is generally under-represented in bromeliad collections in our temperate climates. There are many flowering cultivars to enjoy that have long-lasting inflorescences. Sadly, these are frequently treated as throw-away plants after they finish blooming, as many growers understandably lack the patience to wait for the pups of a green-leaved plant to mature and rebloom. The Vriesea species referred to as the "glyph group" are even more unfamiliar, mostly due to their size. Deciding whether large plants deserve a place in a collection where growing space is at a premium often makes these plants "odd plant out". However, when you consider the year-round beauty of these plants and relative ease of growing them, it may cause you to rethink your priorities! There are just a few species that I like to refer to as the "foliage Vrieseas"- Vr. hieroglyphica, Vr. fosteriana, Vr. platynema, Vr. gigantea, and Vr. fenestralis. Many of these bromeliads can grow up to 4 feet across. It's no wonder that the 20th century nurseryman Alfred Graf gave the moniker "King of Bromeliads" to Vriesea hieroglyphica. Vriesea fosteriana is somewhat more variable in terms of size and foliage coloration, but each is impressive in its own right. These plants are native to the Atlantic

Coastal Forest ecosystem in Brazil, primarily from the State of Rio Grande du Sul in the south and ranging to the State of Espirito Santo in the north. Some grow near to sea level, while they are more commonly found at elevations up to 3000 feet above sea level. They may grow as terrestrials but are more commonly seen as epiphytes. Tenacious roots hold the plants firmly on the host tree, but it's worth noting that the roots are not constantly wet. This suggests that a very freely draining medium is desirable for pot culture. Many growers in Hawaii make liberal use of lava rock as potting media- porous, drains freely, and gives weight to the pot to balance the top weight of the plant. Overlapping leaf bases create virtual compost piles in the sky. Decaying leaf litter, bugs, frogs, lizards all contribute to fertilizing these massive plants. The lesson for indoor culture is that these bromeliads thrive on frequent, but light foliar feeding. One fascinating adaptation is the alternating density of chloroplasts in the leaf tissue. This is not by design to be more attractive to humans, but rather it creates fenestration, designed as a type of window, allowing light not used on one level of the leaves to penetrate to lower leaves that may be excluded from direct sunlight, thus increasing the ability of the bromeliad once again to photosynthesize more effectively. These plants are forest dwellers and can grow very happily with less sunlight than many other bromeliads. Certainly, a greenhouse or large south facing window can be very advantageous, though the newer LED grow lights are a great equalizer for ambitious gardeners in temperate climates seeking to successfully grow

Vriesea 'Hamakua' enjoying a Michigan summer.

Vriesea Kuulei growing in the author's shade house.

these marvelous plants. Plant breeders have taken an active role in selecting smaller, more manageable size plants, all the while developing ever more colorful hybrids! The glyph group of Vrieseas are slow and steady growers. They often take several years to grow from seed or pup to a mature, blooming size plant, but it is a long and always beautiful journey! If you wish to have a little fun doing your own research on this group of plants, go to this page- https://registry.bsi.org/?searchForm From the Genus dropdown box, select **Vriesea**, and in the "notes" box, type in **glyph group**. From the **Max search** line, select **1500** and then click on **Search.** As of May 10, this populates a dropdown box on the left-hand side listing **917** registered hybrids and cultivars!!

Figure 3- Vriesea 'Patrice' is a primary hybrid of Vr. hieroglyphica x fosteriana created by Hawaiian bromeliad grower David Shiigi. Grown by Jerad Walters at JW Succulents in Hudsonville, Michigan

Miniature Neoregelias will be the featured topic at the June meeting. Come and show everyone what you've got! Here are a few enticing examples.