

Correct Identification and plant Nurseries by Butcher 2001

All plant growers love to read a catalogue, to read names hitherto unheard of, to dream what the plants look like and what they would look like in their own collection - in fact "Perchance to dream".

I love to read old catalogues, perchance to dream of what life was like in the past and what names meant then and what they mean now.

Botany and keen plant growing go hand in hand as identifications get amended as each new generation of "Experts" appear. Some "Experts" use purely their remembered experience to pronounce judgement whereas others rely on printed records. I am the second type and love to use coloured photographs as my basis especially of cultivars.

I am lucky that Carol Johnson of Pineapple Place, Florida did keep old catalogues and I am lucky to have a few for posterity. A catalogue was easy to complete "in the old days" if you were a wholesaler because you had few entries but many plants per entry. Even a one-fingered typist could manage that! But consider the problems of stock, and stock control if you served the "Collector" type market primarily for mail-order that Pineapple Place did. No sooner had you typed up your catalogue when plants had already been sold. These days a computer would alleviate these problems, but, I digress.

Let us look at one of the catalogues dated 1976 (attached). This has some 250 plants listed and probably the most accurate because so few unidentified hybrids had yet to be released. Just what did *Aechmea lalindei* look like? This name is synonymous with *Aechmea mariae-reginae* but this name is already on the list! Could it be the plant that got exported to Australia by persons unknown and is really a form of *Aechmea cylindrata*? I was pleased to see *Aechmea* 'Roberto Seidelii' quoted as being *Aechmea racinae* v. *tubiformis* because it clearly shows that the horticultural world was not in line with the botanical world. In the botanical world *Aechmea roberto-seidelii* became an *Aechmea pineliana* look-alike. In the 1978 catalogue we see the addition of *Aechmea seideliana* v. *purpurea* again misidentified because *Aechmea seideliana* in the botanical world is a plant with an erect inflorescence and stiff leaves. This particular problem of misidentification continues to this day even though the correct situation is explained in "Uncle Derek Says".

This problem reinforces my plea that plant nurseries have a responsibility to try to identify species plants especially before offering them for sale. It is so much more difficult to right a wrong than to wrong a right.

By 1980 the list had increased to about 450 different plants but so too had the unidentified hybrids. No real attempt had been made by the BSI to list these hybrids and in this period Brian Smith of Texas, in desperation, privately collated information from various catalogues to produce his "Manuscript" in 1984. The biggest increase in the 1980 catalogue was in *Neoregelia*. Two entries especially interested me. One was 'Morrisoniana' used to produce the registered hybrid 'Bonita' by Pineapple Place. The 'Morrisoniana' on the list had (x?) next to it which suggests it may have been considered a hybrid of 'Morrisoniana' which probably links to 'Rosy Morn' here in Australia. (See Uncle Derek Says). Another was the misspelling of 'Vulkan' as 'x Vulcan' which would have caused identification problems over the years.

There is also the “Note; we have many many neo’s of unknown parentage, all of which are beautiful” which were offered at a higher price than many named cultivars! A similar situation occurred with *Vriesea* and *Guzmania*. In hindsight I would suggest they should have been destroyed or individually named with parents unknown if they were so outstanding. BUT such was the prevailing attitude in the 1980’s.

Let us now look at 1997 catalogue where nearly 1000 names are listed. This clearly shows that the more plants you have to offer the greater the chance of not correctly identifying your stock EXCEPT for new discoveries. Examples - *Aechmea roberto-seidelii* and *Aechmea seideliana* on offer but not *Aechmea warasii*. Is *Billbergia elegans* the true *B. elegans* or the *B. sanderiana* look-alike? *Neoregelia albiflora* has appeared on all lists since 1976 and yet in 1983 Harry Luther pointed out in the JBS that all *N. albiflora* in the USA were *N. tigrina*.

Nurseries play a vital role in disseminating plant material and broadening the interest in Bromeliaceae but they also have a responsibility in trying to educate in correct identification. To err is human but some seem to ignore even the basics and there is no way to police their activities. It may have seemed hypocritical of me to point out the errors in the Pineapple Place catalogues but realistically it is a compliment. I would not give the time to review some catalogues because of their high error rate.

What I am trying to achieve is that we learn from the errors of the past and urge all nurseries to set a high standard of Bromeliad identification.