

The BromeliAdvisory

December 2004

Volume 47, Number 12

This Month's Event -

Annual Holiday Party.

This annual bash is held in lieu of our monthly meeting. There will be no meeting, just a great dinner with dishes prepared by our wonderful members. Non-members are invited and the cost is \$10.00 per person.

The society provides the meat and soft drinks. Clara Kouchalacos will again coordinate the dinner. She will be calling every member to see what each person plans to bring, so we don't get too many of one item. If you don't get a call, please contact Clara directly at

305-461-2367.

Also, we will again have a plant exchange. In order to participate, you must bring a nice plant from your collection wrapped in a manner that keeps the plant a mystery! Participants will then get a chance to choose from the pool of mystery plants after dinner!

See You

Tuesday December 7th 7:30 pm

(A DAY THAT WILL LIVE IN INFAMY)

Yesterday's News :

WOW, first Dick Cheney now Sandy Roth, don't let anyone kid you the job of being a Vice President is tough.

What I'm referring to is the health of our own BSSF VP Sandy Roth who gave us all a good scare in November when she was admitted to the hospital after possibly having a heart attack.

Thank God she didn't. Like the Russians say everyone is healthy until they see a doctor and Sandy lost a week getting checked out but she didn't have a heart attack. She has a condition that requires medication and supervision but it is treatable.

God's speed and good health to you Sandy.

Last month's raffle table was contributed by the Princes. Lots of cool Neos, check out some pictures on the website. Also, the Herndon's brought in a really odd orthophytum for show and tell. If you missed it (or just want see it again) check out more pictures on the website.

Last month's speaker was the remarkable Dr. Ronald Dave Cave. He first got to Central America as a Peace Corps volunteer but when El Salvador melted down he moved his activities over to Honduras and he has been returning ever since.

Good for us because Dr. Cave may have found a natural control for the "Evil Weevil" – A parasitic fly whose larva eats the weevil's larva.

Dr. Cave's works out a facility here in Florida, that is worthy of a Discovery Channel special (or SCI-FI) where in a very secure green house he and others experiment with fauna and flora alien to Florida to advance science and pest control.

I swear if Stephen King or Dean Coontz had been present for Dr. Cave's presentation I know what their next book would be about.

2005 DUES DUE

Enclosed with this issue of the newsletter is a membership renewal form. Please take the time to complete it now, and mail with your check (\$20/single, \$30/dual, payable to BSSF) to Moyna Prince, 11220 SW 107 Ct., Miami, FL 33176.

NOTE: If you joined the society in October or later, you do not have to pay again until 2006.

As in the past, we encourage you to join the Bromeliad Society International. Membership includes the BSI Journal, published in color six times a year. To make it easy to join, just add the BSI dues to your BSSF dues. We will do the rest. Please note that this offer is for new BSI memberships only .

Some members have indicated that they would be willing to waive receipt of the mailed copy of the Bromeliad advisory, which can be seen online at www.bromeliadsareafamily.com . If you would like to do without the hard copy, please answer YES on the line indicated.

What Is a Cryptanthus?

Named from the Greek *krypte*, "hidden," and *anthos*, "flower," these plants, members of the family Bromeliaceae, are related to the pineapple. Their common name, 'Earth Stars,' came naturally from the way their low, spreading rosettes hug the ground "like fallen stars." The variability of shapes, colours, and patterns, plus their adaptability to a wide range of growing conditions, make Cryptanthus a favourite of plant lovers around the world.

Potting

Cryptanthus in their natural habitat are true terrestrials (Growing in the earth). A few varieties are saxicolous (growing in soil pockets among rocks), but none have ever been observed growing as epiphytes (growing on other plants, but receiving nourishment from the air). Cryptanthus should always be growing as potted plants.

The growing medium should be a loose, porous mixture. There are many good mixes: commercial potting soils, African Violet mix, soils mixes or a mixture of peat and sand with perlite. Regardless of the mix chosen, it must be kept damp for best growth. It should never be allowed to totally dry out. Plastic pots help conserve moisture. Successful growers have used capillary matting, wick watering, misting systems as well as the old-fashioned method of watching the plant and giving it a drink when needed.

Cryptanthus should not be under-potted. The develop root systems at least equal to the size of the plant - a five or six inch pot will allow the root system plenty of room to develop.

Light

In their native habitat of Brazil, Cryptanthus can be found growing in a wide variety of conditions; sunny, shady, moist, dry, in forests, and at the ocean side. There is a Cryptanthus variety to fit any light condition. *C. beukerri* and it's hybrids like to be shaded, moist and humid. They are excellent for terrariums. Species such as *C. bahianus* sp 'Cascade', and *C. warasii* will tolerate full sun, but the plants grow better in diffused light. Too much light causes bleaching, sunburn, or gives a leathery stressed look to the plants. Bright, diffused light is necessary to bring out maximum colour in most Cryptanthus.

Lack of enough light will result in dull uninteresting foliage. "Greening" of a usually colorful Cryptanthus, or weak unbalanced growth, is usually caused by insufficient light, proper lighting will bring out the best in Cryptanthus.

Acclimate plants to grow in as much light as possible. The light source may be natural (in the greenhouse, outside with strong, but filtered light, in a windows garden) or artificial ("grow lights" or plant carts). Cryptanthus grow equally well with either.. The colors intensify under fluorescent light, which make Cryptanthus an excellent choice for office decorating.

Whatever the light source, be sure plants receive even lighting. If the light comes from only one side (as in a window

garden, be sure to turn the plants regularly to promote balanced growth.

Temperature

Cryptanthus prefer the same temperatures as their growers.. Optimum growth occurs in a range between 60 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit (16 - 29 degrees Celsius). However, Cryptanthus will thrive in less than optimum conditions. Outdoor gardeners will be please to learn that most Cryptanthus can withstand temperatures just above freezing and some varieties will survive winter outside if they are heavily mulched and the root zone does not freeze. If one wishes to leave plants outdoors over the winter, they should be "hardened off" in the fall by cutting back on the amount of water they receive. Depending on how long the temperatures remain below freezing, leaf damage may be severe, but the mulch protects the root zone and spring brings renewed growth. On the other extreme, Cryptanthus are very tolerant of high temperatures, even above 100 degrees (38 degrees C) as long as there is adequate humidity and potting mix is not allowed to dry out. Again they should be protected from the scorching effects of direct sunlight.

In temperate climates, Cryptanthus grow easily and well outdoors, making beautiful and exotic bedding plants or ground cover. In colder climates, one might consider growing potted Cryptanthus outside during the warmer months. The pots can be sunk into the outdoor garden for the summer, and then easily removed to a safe winter inside, beautifying your home or greenhouse. Cryptanthus grow just

as well, or even better in the year-round controlled environment of an indoor garden.

Humidity

Many Cryptanthus varieties enjoy high humidity which may be increased in the home or office with the use of humidifiers, frequent misting, capillary matting, by placing the pots over water, or grouping plants together. Cryptanthus make wonderful accent plants in well-lit bathrooms or above the kitchen sink where the humidity is generally high.

Fertilizing

Fertilizer is not necessary for Cryptanthus to show off their dazzling colors, but it is necessary for maximum growth. A timed release balanced (14-14-14, 10-10-10) fertilizer combined in the potting mix gives excellent results. Other types of fertilizer such as African Violet, Orchid or organic, used in a diluted form with each watering, work equally well. Like people, Cryptanthus require proper nutrition.

Blooming

Although the name Cryptanthus means hidden flower, many varieties flatten, at maturity to reveal a bouquet of delicate flowers. Some varieties maintain an upright growth with the flowers remaining somewhat hidden, while others actually bloom on a scape (stem). Some varieties display one flower at a time; others exhibit an entire cluster at one show. As different species and cultivars bloom at different times of the year, it is possible to have different varieties in bloom the year

around. They are reliable bloomers - there is no need to force bloom Cryptanthus.

Offsets or Pups

Each Cryptanthus plant blooms only once in its lifetime. But after it blooms, it will reward you with new plants! Beginning before or immediately after blooming, Cryptanthus will produce offsets, or pups - new plants - which form from the axils, from woody stolons (as with *C. bahianus*), or from the base of the parent plant. One will have the beginning of generations of plants to keep or share with friends.

Offsets may be left on the mother plant for multiple growth. The ideal hanging basket plant, sp. 'Cascade' produces long, hanging stolons of up to two feet with rosettes (pups) forming at the ends. Other varieties will form clumps or mats of beautiful color. If one wishes to remove the offsets, allow them to grow to about one-quarter the size of the mother plant. Then, a slight tug will easily detach the offsets from the mother plant. Some varieties release their own offsets when they are sufficiently mature. Don't be alarmed that there are no roots on the pup. In nature the pup would roll to a new location or take root in the decaying humus around the mother plant.

Cryptanthus will root easily in potting medium. Make a small depression, insert the pup's small stem and press the mixture firmly around it. Pot no deeper than the base of the first leaf. Stake the plant if necessary to keep it from rocking back and forth. It is essential for the plant to be secure for an extra fast start and good growth. Bottom heat may speed root

development in colder climates. Place the newly potted plant in a favourable location and water it as one would a mature plant.

Insects and Disease

Cryptanthus are relatively pest-free. By following good horticultural practices severe problems can be avoided. Two of the more common insect problems that may be encountered are mealy bugs or scale. Scale is a destructive insect which forms and remains under a waxy scales on the plants. If either are found on cryptanthus, treat the infected plants with any insecticide recommended for use on houseplants. Wear gloves, follow the manufacturer's instructions for mixing, and dip the entire plant in the insecticide.

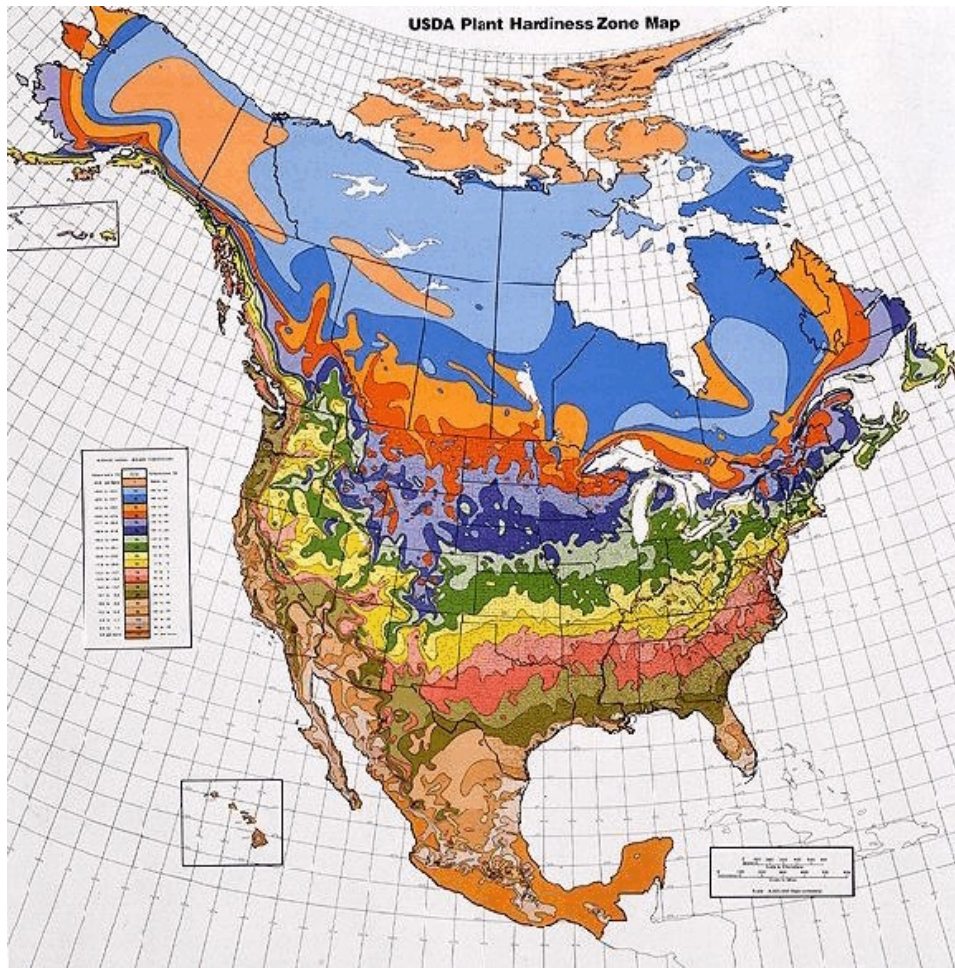
Fungus is the most common disease found in Cryptanthus. There are many good fungicides available. In an area where fungus is a problem use a fungicide regularly.

After any treatment, keep the plant in the shade for at least 4 to 24 hours. Then rinse it thoroughly, but do not place it in bright light until the leaves are completely dry.

With any severe infestation or disease, infected plants should be isolated until the problem is corrected

Cryptanthus should also be protected from contact with galvanized metal, copper and pre-treated wood (1)

PLANT HARDINESS ZONE



Look Online for a more complete explanation of this
USDA MAP (2)

Notes from the Editor:

You may reach me at Bromeliad@timewolf.net via Email or at 10011
S.W. 133rd Street Miami FL 33176 via Snail Mail.

Sources:

(1) Cryptanthus Online
<http://members.iinet.net.au/~scrozier/Culture.html>
A part of the Texas Cryptanthus Society Website.

(2) USDA Website