



UNCOMMON BEAUTIFUL HOUSEPLANTS BROMELIADS

A TROPICAL FAVORITE

For many years the pineapple was the only well-known member of this plant family. But today, we know that it includes a vast assortment of plants with beautiful leaf formations and an amazing diversity of colorful flowers and bracts. Named for a 17th century Swedish botanist who discovered them in tropical jungles while seeking orchids, bromeliads scoff at neglect and furnish color and grace for any interior.

You can choose from small, medium or giant species and various shapes and shades. Most form rosettes of leaves, and some form tubular vases of foliage out of which springs a tall, colorful stem bearing tiny flowers. Some varieties live in soil, and some are 'air plants,' or epiphytes, like *Guzmania*, which can anchor themselves on branches or rocks and take nourishment from the air. Because they can live almost without soil, most varieties can be potted in quite small pots. While others readily take to being mounted in a variety of supports, such as branches, driftwood, rocks or even shells.

Aechmea, the silver vase or urn-plant, is vase-shaped with arching silvery gray-green leaves cross-banded in white. A tall, bright pink cone-shaped flower head spikes up from the center and produces small, blue flowers for months of color. Some bear white, red, or blue berries that last several months.

CARE

Bromeliads grow slowly, which helps keep their color brilliant for months at a time. They appreciate regular misting with plain water, warm temperatures, and bright light (but not direct sun) which keeps the color vibrant. Always keep the bottom leaves of the plant filled with water, and the potting mix barely moist. Pests rarely bother these tough, yet graceful plants.

BROMELIAD BLOOMS

When the flowers fade after several months, suckers (offshoots) appear at the base of the plant. You can cut them off when they are 4-6" high and pot separately. In some varieties, offshoots appear in the center of the parent plant. In some cases, the parent plants will eventually expire after producing their offspring. While the blooming parent plant does not need fertilizer, the offspring will benefit from an occasional diluted solution of houseplant food in the water provided to the plant (don't mist it onto foliage). Change the water weekly to keep it fresh. If possible, use soft water or rainwater.

continued on next page

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TYPES OF BROMELIADS

Cryptanthus -

Often known as the earth star or starfish plant, this variety is small and flat with stiff, spiny leaves. The foliage bears intricate patterns and wavy edges. Cryptanthus multiplies readily, often forming clumps, or plantlets, even in a small pot; these can be removed and potted separately. These terrestrial plants often grow among rocks and fallen trees on their native jungle floor.

Guzmania -

A native of Central and South America, consists of groups of rosette- shaped plants that flash with color. The foliage can be striped with cream or wine-red while the center of the rosette colors up red, orange, yellow, and purple. Small flowers appear in the center, sometimes a contrasting color.

Neoregelia -

From Brazil, this variety makes planters glow with color for 3 months or more. The colors will become more vibrant with more light. Wipe leaves with a damp cloth monthly.

Vriesea -

This variety is also called the flaming sword because of its colorful plumes that last for several months. A north window suits this plant perfectly. Some have pale green leaves, others dark, green foliage marked and banded in brown. All have rosette growth. Keep the vase filled with water.

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