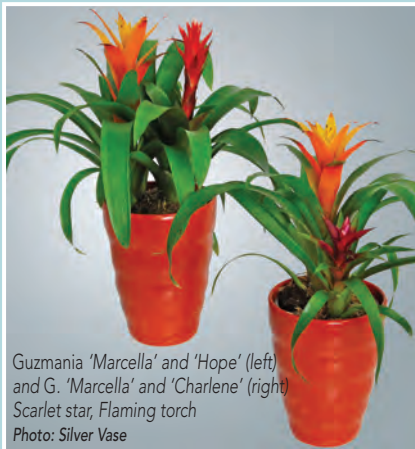




bromeliads



Guzmania 'Marcella' and 'Hope' (left) and G. 'Marcella' and 'Charlene' (right).
Scarlet star, Flaming torch
Photo: Silver Vase

BOTANICAL NAMES

Aechmea spp. (ek-MEE-uh)

Ananas spp. (uh-NAN-us)

Cryptanthus spp. (krip-TAN-thus)

Guzmania spp. (gooz-MAY-nee-uh)

Neoregelia spp. (nee-oh-ruh-JEE-lee-uh)

Tillandsia spp. (til-LAND-zee-uh)

Vriesea spp. (VREE-zee-uh)

COMMON NAMES (vary by species)

Aechmea: Urn plant, Silver vase,

Living vase, Air pine

Ananas: Pineapple

Cryptanthus: Earth star

Guzmania: Scarlet star, Flaming torch

Neoregelia: Blushing bromeliad,

Heart-of-flame

Tillandsia: Air plant, Spanish moss

Vriesea: Flaming sword, Painted feather,

Lobster claws

DESCRIPTION

Bromeliads, from the family *Bromeliaceae* (bro-mel-ee-AY-see-ay), are a large and diverse group of plants known for their exotic blooms and ornamental foliage. They range in size from miniature to giant.

COLORS

Bloom colors vary depending on genus but include red, pink, burgundy, orange, yellow, green and purple. Leaves can be light green to dark green; gray-green; green with ivory edges or stripes; or red, pink and green striped.

DECORATIVE LIFE

Bromeliad blooms can last for several weeks to several months, depending on type and the care they receive. However, after bromeliad blooms fade, the plants often start to die, producing offsets (pups) at their bases (see "Reblooming/Propagation," below). Most bromeliads bloom only once. When the flower bract dries out, cut off the stem inside the cup.

AVAILABILITY

Bromeliads are available year-round.

in-store and consumer care

LIGHT Most bromeliads do best in bright locations but out of direct sunlight, which can burn foliage and blooms. *Ananas* (pineapple) and *Cryptanthus* (earth star), however, can thrive in full sun, as long as they're introduced to it gradually.

WATER Bromeliads' water requirements vary by genus, but most don't need much because, in addition to their roots, these plants also absorb nutrients and moisture from the air through their leaves. Most bromeliads, however, require consistently moist—but not wet—potting medium. Be careful to not overwater; a little water every 10 days to two weeks is usually sufficient for indoor plants. *Tillandsias* (air plants) require only an occasional misting. Use room-temperature distilled water or rainwater. If potting medium dries out, saturate it, and enable the water to drain quickly.

With bromeliads that have a center "cup," or "vase," formed by a rosette of leaves, most experts say that keeping a bit of water in the cup is not necessary for indoor plants. They suggest that standing water can shorten bloom and plant life by

encouraging bacterial or fungal growth, causing the base of a flower spike to rot. If you choose to keep water in the cup, add only a small amount and keep it fresh, replacing it every other day.

TEMPERATURE Indoors, bromeliads do best in temperate environments (65 F to 75 F). Never subject them to temperatures below 60 F for extended periods. *Guzmanias* and *Vrieseas* dislike temperatures above 80 F, but *Ananases* and *Tillandsias* thrive in higher temperatures. Temperatures of 75 F and higher are required for bromeliads to produce blooms.

HUMIDITY Most bromeliads require consistent high humidity (at least 60 percent) because they obtain moisture and nutrients from the air. In dry environments and/or during dry seasons, lightly mist leaves daily with liquid, all-purpose (20-20-20) fertilizer mixed at half strength. You also can place the pot on a pebble tray (a saucer filled with pea gravel that is almost covered with water). Good air circulation also is important for these plants.

FERTILIZER Bromeliads grow better when fed regularly in the summer. Fertilize plants with a liquid, all-purpose (20-20-20) plant

food diluted to half strength. Spray the plant food onto the leaves and dribble a small amount into the soil. Using too much plant food can damage these plants.

POTTING MEDIUM Bromeliads require a rich, light, quickly draining potting medium, such as a mixture of peat moss, sand or perlite, and chopped and decomposed tree bark or pine needles. You also can use an orchid or cactus potting mix.

REPOTTING This is rarely necessary because bromeliads have small root systems, and most grow best when kept in small pots.

REBLOOMING/PROPAGATION Most bromeliads flower only once. After flowering, however, they produce offsets (pups) at their bases. When the offsets are one-third to one-half the size of the parent plant, begin to develop roots and/or begin to form a central cup, cut them, with a sterile knife, from the parent plant, and pot them into a lightly moist peat-moss (two-thirds) and sand (one-third) mixture or an orchid or a cactus soil mix. Do not plant them too deeply. If the pups don't have roots when you pot them, mist them for a few weeks until they develop roots.

If environmental conditions are right,

(Continued on Page 24)

blooming plant of the month

(Continued from Page 22)



Aechmea fasciata
Urn plant, Silver vase



Ananas comosus
Pineapple



Ananas comosus
Pineapple



Cryptanthus bivittatus 'Minor'
Earth star



Guzmania lingulata
Scarlet star, Flaming torch



Guzmania spp.
Scarlet star, Flaming torch



Guzmania spp.
Scarlet star, Flaming torch



Neoregelia carolinae
Blushing bromeliad, Heart of flame



Tillandsia cyanea
Air plant, Pink quill



Vriesea splendens
Flaming sword

Photos: The John Henry Company

you can induce the offsets to flower by exposing them to ethylene gas: Place each plant into a clear plastic bag with one or two apples, seal the bag and let it stand for seven to 10 days at room temperature and in a shady area. You may have to wait six to 14 weeks to find out if the treatment worked. Fertilize new plants with a low-nitrogen/high potassium (3/8/25) plant food.

ETHYLENE SENSITIVITY Ethylene gas is not detrimental to bromeliads; in fact, it is required to stimulate flowering.

challenges

PESTS Mealybugs and scale insects are occasional problems. Scale insects cause brown discs on leaves. Mealybugs cause white cottony-looking patches on leaves.

FALLING AND YELLOW LEAVES Plants are too dry or get too much sunlight.

BROWN LEAF TIPS Not enough humidity for the plants; repeated drying out: too-high temperatures; watering or misting with hard water.

BROWN SPOTS ON LEAVES Sunburn due to exposure to direct sunlight.

FLOWER SPIKES ROT AT BASE Too much water in cup.

PLANTS DIE OR ROT AT BASE WITHOUT BLOOMING Overwatering; insufficient air circulation.

ROOT ROT Overwatering; not enough humidity.

PLANTS DO NOT BLOOM Insufficient light; too young. Most bromeliads do not bloom until they are at least three years old.

OFFSETS DIE WITHOUT ROOTING Offsets taken from parent plant and planted when too young, before roots develop; planted too deeply; not enough humidity.

fun facts

HOME SWEET HOME Most bromeliads are native to the tropical regions of Central America and South America, particularly the rain forests, from Belize and Guatemala south to Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil. The majority of types are indigenous to Brazil.

UP IN THE AIR Most bromeliads are classified as "epiphytes," meaning they grow on trees or elevated supports, obtaining water and nutrients from the air through their leaves, cups and roots; they do not damage the host or support plants. Other bromeliads are "terrestrial," sinking their roots into the forest floor, and still others are "saxicolous," meaning they grow on rocks, with their roots penetrating cracks and fissures to locate moisture and nutrients. **sfr**

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