



**For Immediate Release 2006**

## **The Other Orchid: Bold, Brazen and Beautiful Bromeliad**

**(SAN DIEGO)** -- Place a Bromeliad in a room and it turns heads. With its exotic nature, unusual shape and brilliant colors, the bold Bromeliad evokes the mystery of the jungle, where it grows alongside the more well-known Orchid. Deep in the tropical rainforest, Bromeliad paints the forest with dazzling dollops of color and form on the floor beneath, among the branches and even on top of the dense jungle canopy.

A bold Bromeliad holds its own as a stunning scene-stealer. Bring it indoors and it refuses to be pampered, showing off its impressive bloom up to three or four months, with little need for water, fertilizer or special treatment.

Most of us are more familiar with Bromeliad's less flashy cousins, the juicy Pineapple and air-feeding Spanish moss. With its brilliant colors and enchanting forms, the Bromeliad thrives in tropical rainforests, clinging to trees or rocks or nestled on the ground. Many collect water in the cup formed by tight rosettes of leaves (called *tanks*), creating tiny ecosystems for beetles, butterflies, hummingbirds and other creatures of the jungle.

Bringing the Bromeliad from the rainforest into the home or garden has been an on-going, but successful process. Scientists have cataloged more than 3,000 species of Bromeliad, most unsuitable for domestic use. It's taken many years of careful hybridization for this primal plant to become widely available to the plant-loving public.

Jeffrey Kent, a biochemist and professional Bromeliad hunter and pollinator, has been a major force in the domestication of Bromeliads. An integral partner in family-owned Kent's Bromeliad Nursery in San Diego, California, Kent regularly ventures into the jungles of South and Central America to scout new Bromeliad varieties. Encountering aggressive guerrilla fighters, poisonous snakes and hazardous terrain along the way, Kent has discovered more than 20 new Bromeliad species in the wild. When he's not scouring the wilds for new plants, he's developing hybrids at the greenhouse. Kent's Bromeliad's grows more than 100 varieties and holds patents to more than 25.

For long-lasting color, the Bromeliad is hard to surpass. Its colorful leaf-like centerpiece, made up of tiny buds, or bracts, that are waxy to the touch, can be long or short, flat or rounded, narrow or broad.

Colors range from vivid shades of red and orange to soft peach and pink. Blooms can last from six weeks to four months and are offset dramatically by cool-green, blue-green, striped burgundy and green, speckled or spotted foliage that can be broad or sword-like or thin and grass-like, smooth or, occasionally, spined.

At least one-third of Bromeliad species are air plants that grow on trees or rocks, using only their roots only to hold themselves in place. They draw their water from clouds and fog, as well as from rainwater stored in their tanks. While air, or epiphytic, Bromeliads make intriguing counterpoints in the garden, it's the terrestrial varieties that add visual flavor and excitement to home décor. More than 100 Bromeliad varieties are available for the home and garden at retail stores.

One of the most popular Bromeliads is the fashionable *Guzmania*, with its soft, often shiny spiny leaves and tall scene-stealing flowers that bloom in a rainbow of luminous colors. The *Aechmea* group, another favorite, offers many color choices, too, with flowers that emerge from a water cup formed by upright spiny or spineless leaves.

Low-growing *Neoregelias* create pink, red or purple rosettes when in bloom. The *Tillandsias* group of typically smaller airborne Bromeliads has thin, gray-green leaves and exotic, tropical-looking flowers that come in an assortment of colors, including yellow, pink, red and orange. *Vrieseas* varieties feature soft, upright green or variegated leaves and sword-shaped flowers in red, purple, yellow and orange.

A naturally hardy tropical plant, Bromeliads thrive beautifully indoors, flourishing in low light and with very little maintenance. They love fresh air and do well near a window or doorway, or, placed in a shady outdoor area now and then for a dose of fresh air. Bromeliads rarely need to be fertilized, maybe just once in the spring, twice in the summer and once in the fall with about half the formula required of most house plants. Skip fertilizing altogether during the winter months.

### **Bloom gone? Make another!**

Bromeliad's striking color can last up to 16 weeks, and then the plant slowly dies over the next year or two. In the meantime, though, offshoots, or pups, sprout at the base of the mother plant, offering the gift of another mature plant in less than nine months.

1. Pups usually emerge from the soil near the edge of the pot. They should be allowed to grow until they are one-third to one-half the size of the mother plant and have several sets of leaves.
2. Besides a mother plant with one or more pups, you'll need a second pot, clippers and some newspaper pages to spread over the work area. This won't take long, but it could be messy. You'll also need soil. For the best results mix bark, wood chips or perlite (a quarter to an eighth of an inch diameter) with an equal amount of peat moss.
3. Remove the mother plant and pup from their container.
4. Gently pull the soil away, exposing the area where the mother plant and pup are joined.
5. The pup may or may not have its own root system. If necessary, pull additional soil away so you can have a clear view of the base of both plants.

6. You may not need those clippers after all. Most of the time, the pup can be pulled off the mother plant without the use of any tools. If it resists a firm but gentle tug, make the cut near the base of the mother plant. Replant the mother plant – and only the mother plant – immediately.
7. Before planting the Bromeliad pup, let it sit in the shade for at least a day. This allows the area that has been pulled or cut away from the mother plant to callous, preventing soil-borne diseases from entering through the soft tissue. Then you can plant the pup, using one of the recommended mixtures and gently pressing down on the soil around the base of the pup.
8. Care for the young plant as you would a mature Bromeliad.

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