

The 10 Biggest Mistakes Newcomers Make Growing Bromeliads in the Greater Houston Area

by Gene Powers, Bromeliad Society/Houston

Throwing it out after it blooms

Almost all Bromeliads bloom and then they die. The good news is that many of these produce pups or offsets before they die. These can be left in place and grown as clumps or removed from the parent and separately potted. When 1/3 to 1/2 size, cut the pup flush with the parent using a serrated knife.

Over watering

The potting mix should be free draining and never soggy. Let the mix dry-down between waterings. But do keep fresh water in "vase" shaped plants.

Letting dissolved salts build up in the vase

Dump or flush water from the vase frequently. Dissolved salts concentrate and cause plant "burn," especially in Houston's summer heat.

Wrong potting mix (not soil!)

Use a free draining potting mix. Topsoil is not appropriate!

Not tailoring care to the genus you have

The Bromeliad family has more than 50 different genera with growth habitats that range from rain forests to deserts. About 8 different genera are available in the nursery trade. A general guide is the softer the leaf, the lower the light requirement. Very, very few Bromeliads can take Houston's summer sun directly.

Planting it in the ground



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Very few Bromeliads will survive Houston's winter. If you want your Bromeliad outside in dappled light, sink the pot in the ground, then take it in for the winter.

Expecting it to bloom every year

The cycle from blooming plant to pup to mature blooming pup will take from 2 to 5 years depending on the specie or hybrid. The solution is to have several, and different, Bromeliads. Many Bromeliads have gorgeous blooms, but are plain green otherwise. To have interest between blooms, select some plants with colorful or patterned leaves.

Over fertilizing

Use slow release pellets or none at all. Never put any type of fertilizer in the vase. You will have an overstimulated green or dead plant. Fertilizing bloomed out mother plants will produce more pups.

Adequate light

Too much light and your plant leaf will bleach or burn; too little, and a colorful plant will slowly become just green.

Care of Mounted Bromeliads

If you acquire a plant that is mounted: If it has a vase, then the above advice applies (except for potting mix). If it does not have a vase, soak or spray it with water about twice a week.

For more information: Buy "Bromeliads - A Cultural Manual" from <http://www.bsi.org/new/>. \$4 + postage (or this will be available at the plant sale, Mercer Arboretum, 5/17-18/2014.) <http://bromeliadsocietyhouston.org/> We would be happy for you to attend a meeting. <http://fcbs.org>

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Careful . . . bromeliads become addictive! Left to right, Neoregelia 'Blushing Tiger,' Neoregelia 'Manoa Beauty' and *Cryptanthus ubairensis*.

The plants pictured here represent both common varieties and unique horticulture specimens not generally available. Some will, but some will not, shown and/or sold at the big upcoming Bromeliad Society/Houston Show and Sale. But definitely this is the place to go to see and buy great bromeliads! Sat-Sun - May 17-18 'Bromeliads - Jewels in the Garden' Show and Sale.

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