

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



September 2007

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 20, 2007** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park,
San Francisco

September Program

Searching for Bromeliads in Bolivia – Part 2

In November last year **Peter Wan** and **Carl Carter** made a two week trip to Bolivia. It was supposed to be a combined cactus and bromeliad exploratory trip, but most of the stops concentrated on cacti. Nonetheless, Peter and Carl got enough photos to comprise a two-part show for us.

Carl will be showing digital slides this month of the bromeliads (including cute small Puyas) and cultural scenes of the parts of Bolivia that they covered – mostly at very high altitudes. Carl has also promised to show about 500 slides of Rebutias but no camel shots.



This is *Tillandsia boliviensis*. Wonder where this one comes from? Wonder whether Peter and Carl saw this one? Photo is by Derek Butcher and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies

September Refreshments

Roger Lane signed up for refreshments. Anyone else want to help?

August Meeting

Cristy Brenner provided a fascinating slide show on Peru. Even though we saw lots of bromeliads, Manchu Pichu, local cultural scenes, and wonderful insects and critters, she did not have enough time to go through all of her show on Peru. We missed Lake Titicaca. Thanks for a great show Cristy.

Our members seem to outdo themselves each month with beautiful Show and Tell plants. The show table was packed. And Wes Schilling generously provided many plants for the raffle table – some of them originally from Mulford Foster's collection.

Why Pesticides Have a Use in Our Gardens

This article by Peter Kouchalakos is taken from the July/August 2004 "Bromeliadvisory", newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida.

Contrary to what the "birkenstockers" have to say about chemical applications, they DEFINITELY have a place in our South Florida gardens. I find it amusing that folks get hysterical when the word "chemical" is used in gardening! I'm sure that folks who thought the world was flat also got hysterical when it was suggested otherwise.

The first matter that needs addressing is what the definition of a pest is. A pest may rightly be defined as something that affects the health and well-being of our plants. A pest must be identified and a working knowledge of behavior patterns and lifecycle established before a person decides to impart a specific approach to dealing with the pest.

The main pests in our back yards can be broken into 4 broad categories:

1. Insects and insect-like critters
2. Plant disease (pathogens)
3. Weeds
4. Vertebrates (not your spouse or significant other...well, maybe...if he/she does more damage in the garden than good).

While I could wax poetic on all of the above, the point of this article is to address the responsible usage of pesticidal applications to any of the above in a manner that is NOT harmful to us or our environment. Many of the everyday things we eat (food), apply/ingest (medicines), wear (clothes), and grow (like those plants you bought at the store) have probably come

into contact with some type of chemical pesticidal application, and with good reason. THEY WORK! The question then is why not in our backyards?

The naysayer would have you believe that if you apply systemic or foliar insecticides and fungicides to your plants, you are going to grow tumors, poison our water table, render the air unbreathable, and kill all the wonderful little creatures that inhabit our backyard. This is NONSENSE. If you read the label (very important), it will teach you a world of things you can do to not only safely apply the product, but to do it in an environmentally responsible manner.

While I have no objections to the usage of biological controls like predatory insects (ladybugs, mites – yes, there are good mites), microbial applications (bacillus thuringiensis), and the like. I have found through experience that over the long haul they don't work as effectively in our backyards as they do in a more controlled environment like interiorscapes and such. Why? Let's take ladybugs, for example. You go down to the store and order a couple hundred of the little guys and release them in your backyard. By the way, if you've got young kids, granddads, etc., it's a great way to get them involved in the garden, so have them around when you do the release. You will see them move around in your yard for a day or so. and then they'll move around in your neighbor's yard, their neighbor's yard, etc. The main problem with beneficial insects is they move on and generally will not get the job done in YOUR yard because your whole neighborhood is most likely one huge buffet table for them!

If you are dealing with scale, aphids, and other insects or insect-like critters outside, you can suppress the problem on a much more economical, practical, and effective level by using some type of chemical application. Now, that doesn't mean that you have to use the strongest chemical for your situation.

Here's where that label comes in again. If your insect/pathogenic problem is minor, a chemical application like an insecticidal soap (yes, it's a chemical) or plain old isopropyl alcohol for insects can be effective (70% solution right out of the Walgreen's bottle). I generally recommend a sliding scale approach to using pesticidal applications for a problem. First, use the weaker product on the scale. For example, say you are plagued by Cuban laurel thrips in your yard. [Fortunately, we do not have this pest in California – Ed.] Learn the cycle of the insect and its feeding habits. The internet is a wonderful tool in this regard. Second, try using a "soft" chemical like insecticidal soap or alcohol. If this spot treatment doesn't work, consider a stronger chemical like Orthene wettable powder. I prefer powder to liquids

for a variety of reasons – the primary one being ease of use and cost effectiveness.

Another incredible falsehood that I continually hear is that ‘chemicals kill the beneficials’. I have been using chemical applications for years and can assure you that the beneficials will NOT fall off the face of the earth if you use chemicals in your yard. Our thousands of acres of crops, nurseries, etc. have been responsibly using chemicals for years and not one report of a decline in butterflies (they LOVE my chemical-infested yard), dragonflies (same), or ladybugs (2 varieties visit us) has been issued by any reputable source to my knowledge in Miami-Dade. If you use the chemical responsibly, the bad bugs will die and the good ones will be fine. Most problem insects have piercing-sucking mouth parts while the beneficials don’t. Once the chemical application is made, the only guys generally dying are the ones you are after.

Another ridiculous falsehood is that chemicals will send toxic waste into our air and water. The fluoride in your tap water has a greater chance of hurting us than any of the commonly used chemicals in gardens getting into our water supply. They break down very quickly and generally don’t pose any threat underground. However, I don’t personally believe in the old-fashioned “spray to the point of runoff” philosophy though. Spray enough to cover the affected plants, but not to the point of drenching. As for the airborne issue, yes, the chemical does go airborne while it travels on the water you are applying it with. Water is the “horse” that the chemical rides to its destination.

Most common chemicals don’t float around in the air like little fairies on their own. They need a “horse” to ride. Of course, a conscientious and informed gardener should have already read the label and know that you should be properly attired (Personal Protective Equipment), and to not spray on windy days, or when your neighbor is having a barbeque next door!

We gardeners don’t need to fear chemical pesticides. They are meant to help with many of the serious problems pests pose for us in the garden. They work.

So, remember that big cheeseburger you are munching on as you watch your freshly released ladybugs fly off into the sunset probably has more toxins than anything you’ve just sprayed on your garden!

Short Newsletter This Month

Your editor apologizes for the shorter newsletter this month. Next month – back to regular length.



Here is *Tillandsia lotteae*, another bromeliad endemic to Bolivia. The flower scape is sometimes green. Photo is by Derek Butcher and is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO (BSSF)

The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Recreation room of the San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Meetings feature educational lectures and displays of plants. Go to the affiliate section of the BSI webpage for information about our meetings.

The BSSF publishes a monthly newsletter that comes with the membership. Annual dues are single (\$15), dual (\$20). To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and check made payable to the BSSF to:

Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

BSSF 2007 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT	Carl Carter	510-661-0568	carl.carter@ekit.com
VICE PRESIDENT	Bruce McCoy	510-835-3311	bruce.mccoy@gmail.com
SECRETARY	Dorothy Dewing	650-856-1441	
TREASURER	Harold Charns	415-861-6043	Harold@States-Street.com
DIRECTORS:	Keith Anderson	650-529-1278	e2keith@comcast.net
	Roger Lane	650-949-4831	rdodger@pacbell.net
	Marilyn Moyer	650-365-5560	MarilynMoyer@comcast.net
	Peder Samuelsen	650-365-5560	Pedersam@comcast.net
	Peter Wan	408-605-2637	peterkwan@earthlink.net

BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

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BROMELIAD SOCIETY
OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Roger Lane
Newsletter Editor
551 Hawthorne Court
Los Altos, CA 94024-3121

Join us for a Slide Show on Bromeliads of Bolivia!
