

The Beauty of Bromeliads

The bromeliad family (Bromeliaceae) comprises nearly 3,000 species and are native to North, Central and South America -- from eastern Virginia in the United States to the tip of Argentina in South America. They grow in rainforests and deserts, from sea level to mountaintops. The smallest bromeliad is *Tillandsia usneoides* (Spanish moss), and the largest is *Puya raimondii*, which can be more than twenty feet tall, including the inflorescence. Bromeliads can grow in trees (epiphytes, or air plants), on rocks (lithophytes) or in soil (terrestrial). The best known bromeliad is the pineapple (*Ananas comosus*).

Commonly Cultivated Bromeliads



Aechmea (ek-**mee**-a) - These bromeliads have spiny leaves and deep vase cups to hold water. The inflorescences are spectacular and may last for several months.



Ananas (ah-**nah**-nas) - The pineapple is a member of this genus. Some have spiny leaves, while others are smooth. You can plant the top of a pineapple, and in about a year and a half, your plant will produce a pineapple you can enjoy!



Billbergia (bill-**berg**-ee-a) - Only a few spiny leaves form an urn shape. Usually epiphytic with spectacular inflorescences that are arching or pendulous. The inflorescence only lasts about a week.



Cryptanthus (crip-**tan**-thus) - These plants are small and terrestrial, with tiny white flowers low in the cup. They are sometimes called "earth stars" because of the star-shaped arrangement of their leaves.



Dyckia (**dik-ee-a**) - This genus has thick, very spiny leaves that look like cacti. They can grow in full sun and tall flower spikes that come from the sides. They grow in clusters.



Guzmania (**guz-main-ee-a**) - These are mainly epiphytes (air plants) and do not have spines. The leaves form rosettes, and the inflorescences come from the center.



Neoregelia (**nee-o-re-gee-lee-a**) - Colorful plants with flowers low in the center of the cup. They have spiny leaves, and many turn bright red or purple when in bloom. Some also have red tips on the end of the leaves and are often called "painted fingernail."



Tillandsia (**ti-land-see-a**) - This is the largest and most diverse genus of bromeliads. They vary in size from very small to very large. Some leaves are tough and string-like, while others are soft and strap-like.



Vriesea (**vree-see-a**) - These have smooth leaves with colorful and long-lasting inflorescences that may be shaped like feathers or are pendulous.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:

Bromeliads (UF-IFAS Circular 1090)
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG272>

Bromeliad Society of Central Florida
<http://mybscf.org/>