



Newsletter of the

# Hawai'i Bromeliad Society

VOL. 41 NO. 2

HONOLULU, HAWAI'I

FEBRUARY 2018

## FEBRUARY MEETING TO FEATURE PETER DE MELLO

Program chairs Gail and John have lined up a real treat for HBS members for our next meeting: a visit from renowned *Tillandsia* expert Peter De Mello, Jr. He will be happy to answer all our questions about *Tillandsia*—the largest genus in the bromeliad family, with about one thousand different varieties—and will discuss his secrets for propagating, growing, and showing them.

*Tillandsia* have moved from a hobby to a second career for Peter, who has been growing them for over thirty years. "I started by using *Tillandsia* for shade for my orchids and it kind of went from there," he explains. Peter has been a long-standing member of the Hawai'i Bromeliad Society, and has done a lot to educate and interest people in growing *Tillandsia*, including appearing on a panel and displaying his plants at our 2014 Bromeliad Society International conference. So come prepared with any questions you may have about mounting, fertilizing, propagating, watering, or identifying *Tillandsia*, or about matching varieties to your own growing locations. As we shall see, the almost endless varieties of *Tillandsia* make them ideal for just about anyone's growing conditions—and budget. He will bring plants for show and tell, including some of his special hybrids, but also some to sell, so come prepared to buy!



For another special event planned for our February meeting, see page 4!

A view of Peter De Mello's display at the 2014 BSI conference in Honolulu.

### 2018 OFFICERS OF THE HAWAI'I BROMELIAD SOCIETY

PRESIDENT  
Terese Leber

TREASURER  
Dolores Roldan

HOSPITALITY  
Susan Andrade

NEWSLETTER/RECORDING SECRETARY  
Stanley Schab

VICE PRESIDENT/PROGRAM CHAIR  
Gail & John Ishihara

MEMBERSHIP  
Val Wong

LIBRARY  
Merrill Cutting

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY  
Karen Rohrer

## FEBRUARY MEETING

This Saturday, February 24,  
we meet at **Lyon Arboretum**  
at **12:30.**

Our hospitality hosts are  
**Val and Randy and Ed.**

## REPORT OF THE MEETING OF JANUARY 27, 2018

Lyon Arboretum

ATTENDING: Susan Andrade, Dina Chuensangueonsat, Merrill Cutting, David Fell, Naty Hopewell, Gail Ishihara, John Ishihara, Terese Leber (presiding), Wendie Liu, Sally Mist, Ed Nishiyama, Dolores Roldan, Jaime Roldan, Stan Schab, Lynette Wageman, Randy Wong, Val Wong. GUESTS: Sara, Susan.

CONVENED: 12:50; ADJOURNED: 3:00.

Terese welcomed everyone to a new year of HBS adventures, and apologized for any miscommunications about the timing of our December party. She noted that the first order of business for the year was to approve a slate of officers and program chairs. Upon request, the officers from last year agreed to serve another year, and Val volunteered to serve as membership chair. Members moved to

**approve the appointment for 2018 of Terese Leber as president, Gail and John Ishihara as vice president/program chair, Dolores Roldan as treasurer, Val Wong as membership chair, Susan Andrade as hospitality chair, Merrill Cutting as librarian, Stan Schab as newsletter editor and recording secretary, and Karen Rohter as corresponding secretary.**

TREASURER: Dolores circulated the annual report for 2017. Our total income for the year amounted to \$4,419, coming primarily from our monthly auctions and membership dues, and a whopping \$1,741 from the East-West Center craft fair. We spent \$2,472.49 last year, with the largest expenditure the \$1,000 contribution to Lyon Arboretum to fund a student worker to help out in the bromeliad garden. Our year-ending balance on December 31, 2017 was \$12,873.28. For a copy of the annual report, contact Terese or Dolores.

Terese reported that the dues for our affiliate membership in the Bromeliad Society International and the Cryptanthus Society are paid for 2018, but that we could consider making an additional donation to support BSI's educational and research programs. She also noted that in keeping with our practice for the past several years, we should make a donation to Lyon Arboretum as a thank you for use of their meeting facilities. Members approved that

**HBS donate \$300 to the general fund of Lyon Arboretum, and \$1,000 to the Arboretum to fund a student worker for the Spring 2018 semester.**

Terese reminded members that because the Internal Revenue Service has granted HBS 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit educational organization, contributions to the Society may be tax deductible, and she can provide a letter and tax form to donors certifying our non-profit status.

LIBRARY: Merrill reported that she had purchased DampRid, an desiccant, for the library cabinet, to help soak up moisture and counter the humidity in the lower classroom where the cabinet is kept.

HOSPITALITY: Our hospitality hosts for February are Val and Randy (food) and Ed (drinks). Susan circulated a sign-up sheet for 2018 hospitality volunteers.

MEMBERSHIP: Terese thanked Val for agreeing to serve as membership chair, and reminded members that annual dues—\$15 for an individual, \$20 per family—should be given to Dolores, who will issue a receipt.

PROGRAMS: Upcoming meetings will include a field trip to David's home and nursery, and educational programs by Lynette.

CRAFT FAIR: Dolores reported that the net return on our participation in the East-West Center craft fair was \$1,599.79, based on gross income of \$1,741 and \$141.21 in expenses. Terese thanked Gail for taking the lead on planing, organizing, and overseeing the event.

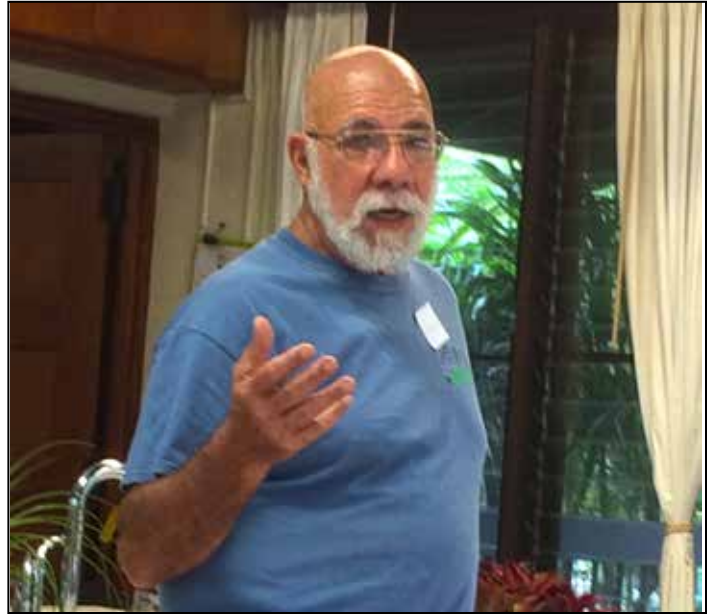
NEW BUSINESS—WINDWARD ORCHID SHOW: Terese reported that the organizers of the Windward Orchid Society have invited HBS to present a two-table display at their 2018 Spring show, "Pot o' Orchids," which will be held from March 23 to 25. Display set up is scheduled for 9 a.m., Thursday, March 22, and breakdown on Sunday, March 25, at 4:01 p.m.; more specific information will be forthcoming. If you have any ideas or suggestions for the display, please contact Terese or Gail.

AUCTION: Thank you to all who donated plants for the auction, which featured some great bargains left over from the craft fair, and some beautiful cultivars, including *Neoregelia* "Fairy Nice," "Kahala Dawn," and "Hear No Evil" (a Vinzant cultivar), and *Vriesea* 'Rafael'; many thanks to David, for serving as a persuasive and knowledgeable auctioneer.

## "PLANTS LIKE TO EAT": SOME TIPS ON FERTILIZATION

As David Fell remarked at our last meeting, if you talk to a thousand bromeliad growers, you'll find a thousand ways to grow bromeliads successfully. In January he generously shared some of what decades of experience have taught him about one of the most debated aspects of bromeliad cultivation: fertilization.

Plants like to eat, he notes simply, and if you want your bromeliads to grow, you need to feed them. And like most living things, they will do better with a steady, consistent diet. With fertilization, plants and flowers will grow bigger, faster. But whether to fertilize, how to fertilize, how often, and with what depends on your particular goals, as well as the number, variety, and location of your plants. Commercial growers, for example, need to fertilize the plants in their greenhouses according to a schedule that will encourage regular, predictable flowering. For his own plants at home, David doesn't feed the bromeliads that are growing in the landscape, but does fertilize those growing in his shade houses.



In figuring out how to fertilize bromeliads, it helps to know at least a bit about their botany. Bromeliads can absorb nutrients through their leaves, but their roots are sensitive to salt, which can build up from using dry fertilizer. Therefore, to keep fertilizer out of the pots and avoid burning the plant roots—never put slow release fertilizer against the base of a bromeliad, David cautions—he uses a water-soluble mixture to foliar feed his plants, providing them with nutrients through their leaves. Because of the size of his greenhouses, he has developed a way to feed his plants on one day, and then water them on the following day, which he does twice a week, using a Siphonex system to inject fertilizer into a built-in irrigation network that sprays out a fixed ratio of about one part fertilizer to sixteen parts water. If you have a fewer number of plants to fertilize, other methods are possible: Larry, for example, uses a backpack sprayer, while Ed uses a hose attachment.

As to what fertilizer to use, David commented, use whatever you have, because pretty much anything will work. When choosing a fertilizer it is important to understand that the numbers in a fertilizer's name refer, in order, to the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium it contains. In general, David noted, bromeliads don't need a lot of phosphorous, which can burn their leaf tips, or as much nitrogen as plants that absorb most of their nutrients through their roots. Bromeliads do, however, have a higher demand for potassium. David mixes his own fertilizer concentrate, but a *Tillandsia* fertilizer is available online (or sometimes at Koolau Farmers), and readily available commercial brands work well too, such as Jack's Classic 20/20/20 or fertilizers developed for orchids.

Various genera of bromeliads respond differently to the use of fertilizer. *Billbergia* and *Neoregelia*, for example, have clear reactions: overfeeding them can lead to long, strappy, leaves; underfed plants tend to be overly compact. With many bromeliads, like the *Tillandsia cyanea*, for example, overfertilization causes the plant leaves to lose color and become more green. In general, the thicker-leafed bromeliads can take higher amounts of fertilization. About every three weeks, for example, Ed applies a liquid-soluble 13/2/13 orchid fertilizer to his potted *Neoregelia*, and a 20/20/20 fertilizer on his *Guzmania*

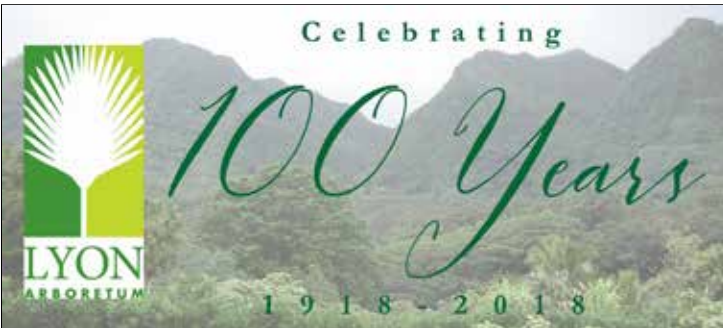
Plants will flower better if they are well nourished, but fertilizing can also be used to help time the flowering of bromeliads or to encourage pupping. If he wants to goose his *Neoregelia*, for instance, David has been known to use a supplemental feeding, such as a slow release fertilizer like Nutricote applied as a top dressing in the plant cups (but not the soil), which has an impact similar to destroying the plant's primary growing point with a screwdriver, causing them to put more energy into creating pups than into flowers or seeds.

The bottom line on fertilization is that a little is really good, a lot is really bad. You can kill bromeliads fast by overfeeding them, David notes, but a little fertilizer, judiciously applied, will give you healthier, happier plants.



### NAME THAT PLANT!

Our January meeting featured a great lesson in plant identification from Lynette, who challenged us to name the different plants she brought in from her own garden (just the genus, for us beginners!), and to justify our answers. She then provided a range of tips for distinguishing bromeliad genera using the look and feel of the leaves and leaf edges, the overall shape and size of the plant, and the color, size, location, and design of the inflorescence. Thank you, Lynette; now if we can only remember all that you showed us!



### FEBRUARY MEANS SPRING CLEANING —AND BARGAINS GALORE

As a special treat, at our February meeting Gail and John and Larry will be offering up a variety of great plants for auction: the results of “spring cleaning” their yards and greenhouses. If you also have plants that need new homes, please bring them to the meeting— although with these bargains, you’ll probably go home with more than you brought!

Happy Anniversary to Lyon Arboretum—it’s turning 100 this year, and will be holding a variety of special events to celebrate its centenary. Renowned nowadays as a lush environment for native and tropical plants, one hundred years ago Lyon began as a water conservation project. Plantation agriculture in Hawai‘i—particularly sugar—required lots of water, and by the early 1900s much of O‘ahu’s native forest had been destroyed, leaving rainwater to flow directly into the ocean rather than into the ground water table. At the suggestion of plant pathologist Harold Lyon, the Hawai‘i Sugar Planters’ Association bought land in upper Mānoa to test whether introduced trees and other plants could be used to restore damaged watersheds.

Following World War II, Lyon convinced the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai‘i to accept the land from HSPA and turn the site into a scientific, cultural, educational, and community resource. Open to the public since 1972, Lyon Arboretum currently hosts about 50,000 visitors a year. The Arboretum’s plans for this year include increased signage—especially, with our help, in the Bromeliad Garden—and new plantings of bromeliads by the Visitor’s Center.

This March, Lyon is offering a Docent Guides’ Training Course, if you want to learn more about the Arboretum and become a volunteer guide. Information about the course can be found on the Arboretum website. And if leading groups of curious plant lovers around the Arboretum is not your cup of tea, another March class is “Biryanis and Beer,” a show-and-tell on how to cook a perfect North Indian rice dish and wash it down with just the right craft beer.

