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How to grow *Cryptanthus* the dazzling Earth Stars



Cryptanthus fosterianus 'Lisa Vinzant'



POTTING

Cryptanthus in their natural habitat are true terrestrials (growing in the ground) and a few are saxicolous (growing among rocks). They have never been observed as epiphytes (living in trees) and should not be mounted.

Cryptanthus should not be under-potted. They develop root systems at least equal to the size of the plant — a five or six inch plastic pot is recommended to help conserve the needed moisture. The medium should be a loose, porous mixture similar to African Violet mix. This should never be allowed to totally dry out. There are many good mixes; commercial potting soil, African Violet mix, soilless mixes, or a mixture of peat and sand with perlite. Regardless of the mix, it must be kept damp for best growth. Cryptanthus do well on capillary matting, wick watering, misting system or the old-fashioned method of watching the plant and giving it a drink when it needs it.

FERTILIZING

Although it is not necessary to fertilize your Cryptanthus to have the dazzling display of color and exquisite markings, you must fertilize to obtain maximum growth.

Cryptanthus are not finicky about fertilizer. However, use dilute solutions, even to a quarter of the recommended strength. There are many excellent brands on the market — any even balanced fertilizer works well (14-14-14, 10-10-10, etc.)

Many African Violet growers use AV fertilizers on their Cryptanthus and the results are outstanding. A time-released granular fertilizer combined into the potting mix for newly planted offsets show excellent results. Many Cryptanthus fanciers fertilize with each watering, using an extremely dilute solution. Orchid fertilizer is excellent. Organic fertilizers are also good. The point is, Cryptanthus, like us, like to eat. The amount of fertilizer really depends on the intensity of light in which the plants are grown. (Light + CO₂ + H₂O + Groceries = a healthy, happy plant.)

LIGHT

There are Cryptanthus which will grow in every light condition you may have. *C. beuckeri* is a low-light plant and many of its progeny like to be shaded, moist and humid. This makes *C. beuckeri* and its hybrids ideal plants for terrariums. Species such as *C. bahianus*, 'Cascade' and *warasii* can take full sun, but you will find the plants happier in diffused light.

For maximum color in most Cryptanthus, bright diffused light is necessary. Too much light will cause bleached spots on the foliage or a leathery, stressed look to the plant. In extreme cases, sunburn spots or holes will occur. On the other extreme, weak foliage and greening of color suggests that the plant needs more light. Acclimate your plants to grow in as much light as possible. Your light may come naturally (in the greenhouse, outside with high shade, in a window garden) or artificially such as on the plant carts that many indoor growers use. Some growers line their walls with reflective material to provide additional light. In fact, The colors intensify under fluorescent light. This makes the Cryptanthus an excellent office plant.

TEMPERATURE

Cryptanthus are comfortable in temperatures the same as you, as are other bromeliads. 60 to 85 degrees brings out the best growing conditions. Most Cryptanthus can survive just above freezing, and some survive winter outside with a heavy mulch if water is cut back in the fall and the plants are allowed to "harden off": Depending on how long it stays below freezing, even in the twenties, severe leaf damage results but the mulch protects the root zone and Spring brings abundant, beautiful offsets. On the other extreme, they can take temperatures above one hundred as long as there is adequate humidity and the mix is not allowed to dry out. Cryptanthus are easy to grow outside in temperate regions and make exotic bedding plants. They grow just as well or better in the controlled environment of any indoor grower.

HUMIDITY

Many Cryptanthus enjoy humid conditions which may be increased inside the home or office by humidifiers, misting frequently, setting the pots over water or grouping together. Capillary matting does a great deal to increase humidity and maintain moisture. Cryptanthus grow wonderfully as accent pieces in a well lighted bathroom or above the kitchen sink where the humidity is generally greater.

INSECTS & DISEASE

Bromeliads in general are relatively pest free. Should you encounter scale, wear gloves and dip the plant in any recommended non-copper containing insecticide (following manufacturer's instructions for mixing). Shade the plant at least four to 24 hours. Then rinse the plant but do not place it in bright light until the leaves dry. It is always wise to follow good horticultural cleanliness practices. Do not allow your plants to come in contact with galvanized metal, penta or copper.

BLOOMING

As with most bromeliads, the parent plant blooms only once in its lifetime. Cryptanthus are reliable bloomers. Different species and cultivars bloom at different times of the year and it is possible to have a collection blooming year-round. Although the name Cryptanthus means hidden flower, you are rewarded at maturity with a bouquet of delicate flowers. Depending on the species or cultivar, flowers may bloom one flower after another, or a cluster may open at the same time. Some varieties flatten and some bloom high on a scape.

Flowers are generally white; but certain clones of *C. bromelioides* has pinkish flowers, and efforts are underway to introduce fragrance, and pink to lavender flowers to modern cultivars from newer discovered species in Brazil. There is no need to force-bloom your Cryptanthus—they know their duty. The slowest to mature is the somewhat rare *C warasii*.

OFFSETS OR PUPS

Your Cryptanthus will produce offsets with new plants coming from the leaf axis, from woody stolons (as with *C. bahianus*) or from the base of the plant. This may begin before or immediately after blooming. The ideal hanging basket plant, *Cryptanthus* 'Cascade' produces long, hanging stolons of up to 2 feet with rosettes at the end.

Offsets may be left on the mother plant for multiple growth or may be removed when ready (approximately one-third the size of the mother) with a slight twist and tug. The pup will release easily when it is ready. Some plants release their own offsets when they are sufficiently mature. Don't be alarmed that there are no roots on the pup. In nature the pup will roll to a new location or will take root in the decaying humus of the mother plant thus forming clumps or mats.

Your plant will root easily in your potting medium. Make a small depression, insert the short stem and press the mixture firmly around it. Pot no deeper than the base of the first leaf. Stake the plant if necessary to keep it from rocking back and forth. It is essential the plant feel secure for an extra fast start and good growth. Bottom heat may speed root development in colder climates. Place the plant in good growing conditions and water as you would a mature plant.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Then join the Cryptanthus Society, and have fun growing and showing these wonderful plants. A membership application is included on the back of this brochure. Send it in today and start receiving the color Journal of the Cryptanthus Society. You'll be glad you joined; folks all over the world share their growing experiences. You too, can grow incredible blue-ribbon plants. And your achievements will help and encourage other Cryptanthus growers.

THE CRYPTANTHUS SOCIETY & YOU

We are a nonprofit, horticultural organization striving to promote and maintain public and scientific interest in research, preservation, development and distribution of Cryptanthus throughout the world. Members find new friends in Australia, North America, South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. Plant lovers like you are growing in windows, in greenhouses, in indoor light gardens and outside in temperate regions. We're working to make everyone aware of how much fun and how easy it is to grow Cryptanthus. You can help.

• We publish a color Quarterly Journal ...for both the amateur and the professional; the explorer, the scientist, the hybridizer, the grower and the blue-ribbon winner. As a member you'll be among the first to find out about recently discovered species, the latest hybrid, the newest growing "secrets": Discover new friends who share your amazement, excitement and delight growing these wonderful plants. We look forward to you sharing your experiences.

• We are active in research ...to provide support for the identification of new species; to promote registration of worthy hybrids and to assist in the education of judges to accurate judging standards thorough clear documentation.

• We promote growing and showing ...with affiliate societies throughout the country who encourage their members to show and promote Cryptanthus locally. The Cryptanthus Society provides cultural sheets and two awards annually for best species and hybrid exhibit in each affiliate society's show.

• In conjunction with an affiliate society, an International Cryptanthus Show is hosted during the year between the BSI World Bromeliad Conferences. A separate Cryptanthus Auction is held annually at WBC and ICS events. Please join and support the Cryptanthus Society today.

Application for Membership to the Cryptanthus Society

Carole Richtmyer
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Please fill in every line that applies to you. Type or print carefully. Your records are made from this form. Return this application to: 18814 Cypress Mountain Dr.

NAME _____ Phone# (_____) _____

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Make checks payable to the Cryptanthus Society. Members outside the USA should remit International Money Order or cashier's check payable in US funds on any US bank. Personal checks not drawn on US banks cannot be accepted.

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