

# Bromeliad & Tropical Plant Society of Tampa Newsletter



[www.bromeliadguildoftampabay.org](http://www.bromeliadguildoftampabay.org)

November 2023

**Bromeliad and Tropical Plant Society of Tampa**  
**Meeting: Monday, November 20, 2023**  
**Speaker: Dennis Cathcart**



**Dennis Cathcart**



**Tropiflora Nursery**

The title of Dennis's program will be *A Naturalist Visits Cuba*. Of course there are parts on the bromeliads he found on three trips to Cuba last year, but it will also feature reptiles, birds and general habitat shots, as well as Cuban lifestyle and culture photos.

Dennis has spent a lifetime exploring the jungles, mountains, and deserts of the world's tropics pursuing exotic plants. He established Tropiflora, LLC in 1976, a world-renowned plant nursery in the Bradenton-Sarasota area.

A recognized world authority on bromeliads, he lectures worldwide on their habitats, culture, and conservation. His plant discoveries are many, three bear his name, and his collections grace herbaria, botanical gardens, and private collections across the globe. Dennis Cathcart is also a pioneer in the history of reptile collecting, having lived the life during the 1960s and -70s when the hobby was relatively obscure.



## About Tropiflora Nursery

**Tropiflora** was established after a bromeliad collecting hobby got out of hand. Successful cultivation of bromeliads did not come easy at first. After observing Tillandsias and other bromeliads in the wilds here in Florida and in Central and South America during years of reptile collecting, I finally made the move to try to collect and cultivate a few specimens. Success was elusive. Poor choices of plants and bumbling efforts at acclimating them resulted in many disappointments. Luckily my interests persisted and finally I was able to keep a few alive. Over the first year of collecting, I had amassed a staggering array of species of about ten, which I thought must have been the world's largest collection. Not long after that, I discovered that I was not the only one collecting bromeliads, and new worlds opened up to me. I found that there were actually nurseries selling them, albeit not that many back then, and that there were others right in my hometown with an interest in bromeliads. Soon I was part of a small but growing network of hobbyists and not long after that, discovered an actual bromeliad society, which I promptly joined! My collection grew exponentially after that until soon my yard was completely full of them. I had run out of room and looked for another option for my burgeoning collection. I had already built several small structures to house the collection and needed more space. I was lucky to find a rundown greenhouse that needed lots of work on an old, defunct orchid nursery, and was able to use it in exchange for fixing it up for the new owner. It was 'professional size' and soon I was awash in bromeliads. I had already started selling my excess stock at meetings, yard sales and through a little agricultural products paper put out by the state. It was soon obvious that I had to either cut back or do more to sell my excess stock. I opted for selling more and put together a small list, took out an ad and started a back yard business. It was slow at first then as word spread, business picked up and I found myself once again in a quandary. Now I needed more space if I was to continue, but that was a big move. Eventually though, I leased some land east of Bradenton, Florida and built a range of greenhouses that covered 10,500 square feet, then registered my new business, Tropiflora, as an official nursery operation. The year was 1976.

For the next five years, we grew in stature as our collection of plants improved and the periodic price lists became a catalog with many hundreds of species available. Travels to Mexico, Central and South America became more frequent and newer and more exotic bromeliads were acquired. We had established a network of contacts in several countries and had worked out trades and purchases with more and more collectors and suppliers. Our collection was recognized as one of the most complete. Life was good and things went well and eventually we once again felt growing pains. This time we purchased some land in Sarasota in partnership with a good friend in South Aeria and began a slow transition. The raw land was a cattle ranch and we had to start from scratch to develop it. A road in, storage barn and a shade house to cover an acre were our first projects, followed by two 30 x 96 foot greenhouses. Little by little we expanded over to the new location and added more shade and greenhouses. Not long after that, some big personal changes came into my life and I eventually met and married my wife, Linda. With her help we soon made the move complete and cut ties with the Bradenton land, tearing down and moving the greenhouses to the new location.

With the new surroundings and plenty of space to build, we began to branch out to other types of plants. Orchids were a natural, as our South American friend was a force in orchids in his home country. We had a close relationship with the new Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota whose main mission was epiphyte research. Harry Luther we had already known from our membership in the Florida West Coast Bromeliad Society, hired on at Selby in its first year to become head of bromeliad research. Constant exposure to a whole world of other interesting plants finally wore us down and we began to add aroids, cycads, ferns, ant plants, Gesneriads, Hoyas and more to our inventory. Succulents too were of interest because of many trips to deserts in the tropics and we steadily built a substantial collection of caudiciforms, stapeliads, and more, including a first class collection of Rhipsalis and other epiphytic cacti. By this time, Linda and I were making trips every few months to distant places in search of new plants to add to our propagation program and our collection grew at a rapid pace. More and more greenhouses had to be built to accommodate the collections and more sophisticated techniques had to be developed. Our staff had grown from a one man show in the early 70's to one, then quickly two employees in '76. Now we were over ten and headed upwards.

In 1991 we shifted our sales efforts to a new experiment, the Cargo Report. A catalog made along the lines of a newsletter with information about the plants and a bit of adventure in the way of stories and anecdotes from our increasing travels. Our great friend Wally Berg whom we had met while still at the Bradenton site, became not only a good customer but a good friend then a frequent travel companion on many an adventurous expedition to Central and South America. Wally was himself growing from a rank novice to a world recognized expert in bromeliad cultivation. While never becoming commercial, Wally and his wife Dorothy surrounded their Sarasota home with thousands of bromeliads they had purchased and collected. A huge screen enclosure to accommodate a large pool was built on the back of their house, but they filled it instead with a forest of tropical plants and only a small fish pond instead of a pool. It was to become known as the 'Berg Cage' and was the center of Wally and Dorothy's hobby and the site of many a happy day spent with their plants and with visitors from all over the world. Well it turns out that Wally was a good traveler after some initial 'adjustments' and he and I made dozens of trips to many exotic places and had a plethora of adventures in the process. Eventually these adventures became the heart and soul of the Cargo Report and we initially published six issues per year, filled with exotic plants and adventure. Our business sprang to life with the Cargo Report's influence on sales, and we grew at a rapid pace. Soon our staff topped 20 people and things were good. The Cargo Report, which had started out black and white with eight pages and hand drawn illustrations by Verona Simmons, evolved in time to a full color, twenty page magazine with hundreds of photos. We sold plants, told stories and had some laughs along the way. But as the years went by, things changed. Not the least of things was my age. No longer as young and full of energy and with business getting more and more complex, the Cargo Report eventually slowed down. The



passing of our dear Friend Wally in 2000 took away some of the good times we had traveling and a whole lot of the great stories that often used Wally as a foil. Finally, what has become the last of the 'regular' Cargo Reports, after nineteen straight years, was published in July of 2009. We had already made the decision to develop an advanced website about five years previous and we redoubled our efforts to that end. The economy is no longer what it used to be, and it has become an economic imperative to do away with the printed Cargo Report, a move that makes us both sad and happy, if you can imagine that. The expense of doing the printing and mailing and the sheer pressure of work to produce the magazine, made it no longer as much fun as it used to be. The need for a comprehensive website to accommodate a collection of plants that had reached over 7,000 varieties and do so in a manageable way, had become our only obvious route to the future of this business.

Today we are an operation with approximately six acres of indoor space in our various greenhouses as well as additional outdoor growing areas. Our collection continues to grow and we have narrowed our crops to the core plants of our interest. Our orchid production, while much of it is still here at Tropiflora, has been shifted to a consignment operation with another nursery in charge of production. We have maximized our production of bromeliads, concentrating on both species for collectors and botanic gardens and with the latest hybrids for fanciers and the landscape trade. We have a huge production of miniature species and hybrids suitable for terrariums as well as almost four hundred varieties of Tillandsias. We have massive production of exotic succulents including terrestrial bromeliads, Rhipsalis, Hoya, Dischidia and Ant Plants. We have many exotic aroids, ferns and fern allies and dozens of other rare plant oddities and exotic species. Our main thrust is still mail-order, both retail and wholesale and export to many countries. We also have expanded our landscape bromeliad and succulent inventory to accommodate both local demand and those of botanic gardens, zoos and resellers all over the world. Walk-in business can enjoy our dedicated display greenhouse or look over our entire stock in the many acres of greenhouses. We are open to the public six days a week. Our staff consists of experts in every main area of our production with experienced, interested and well traveled growers to help you. Linda and I still travel frequently and have expanded our travels to Asia, Australia, and Africa in search of new varieties for our clients, sometimes accompanied by other members of our staff. We lecture all over the U.S.A. and in many countries as well, spreading our love of bromeliads and other exotic plants far and wide. Linda and I are proud that our now adult children, Robin and Scott have joined the company and will eventually help carry Tropiflora into the second generation. The website you see here is the newest outreach in our thirty five years of business in the plant world. We hope you will find your experience here both interesting and rewarding. We have survived this long through dedication to the wants and needs of our clientele and through our friendly customer service. As you peruse the pages of this site, we want you to know that you are only a toll free call away from a live person who will be happy to assist you in any way. Your satisfaction is our goal and your comments and suggestions are always welcome.

**Bromeliad & Tropical Plant Society of Tampa**  
**Minutes of Meeting October 16, 2023**

Business meeting called to order by president, Carol Wolfe

Treasurer's Report: Rick Hunter, report was filed for audit.

Secretary's Report: Motion to accept the minutes as they appeared in the newsletter. Ken Stokes moved. Seconded by Tom Wolfe. Motion carries.

Carol Wolfe reported on the USF plant sales. An excess of one thousand dollars in plants was sold. Carol thanked all the members who helped make the sale a success.

Show and Tell: Plants were shown by: Taira Hoopes, Mark Victor and Jill Zakaroff.

Raffle plants were presented by Tom Wolfe.

An open house will take place at Ken Stokes' property Saturday, October 21, 9 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Christmas Party. Party will be held at Woodmont meeting place, December 16 at 6:00 p.m. Details will follow.

Motion to close business meeting by Mark Victor, seconded by Ken Stokes.

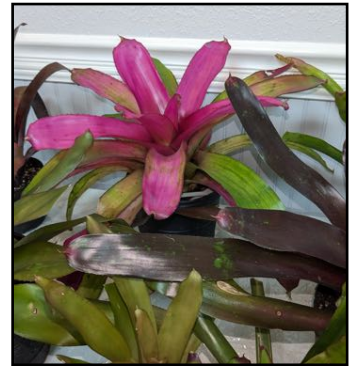
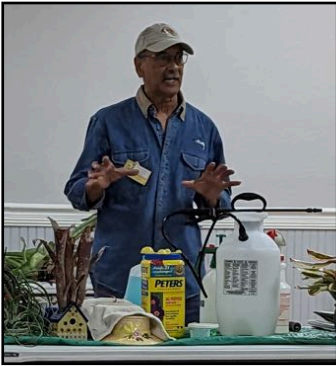
Program was presented by Robert Nelson on unique ways to display your plants. Robert showed how to drill holes in the bottom of clay and ceramic pots using a diamond drill bit. He also led a discussion on the best type of fertilizer for bromeliads.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Wolfe



## Meeting Snapshots - October 16, 2023



## Kenneth's Garden Tour - October 21-22, 2023



# BROMELIAD & TROPICAL PLANT SOCIETY OF TAMPA

## Membership Application/Renewal

Memberships: January 1 to December 31 each Year

### Please Print

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Month \_\_\_\_\_

Second Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Month \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Application \_\_\_\_\_

Please check one:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25.00 Single Membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$30.00 Family Membership

Make checks payable to BTPST

Submit with application to:

Rick Hunter

2105 Colewood Lane

Dover, FL 33527

FOR FIRST-TIME MEMBERS: How did you hear about BTPST?

\_\_\_ Friend \_\_\_ Newspaper \_\_\_ Facebook \_\_\_ BTPST Website \_\_\_ Florida State Fair

\_\_\_ Plant Festival or Show Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Bromeliad & Tropical Plant Society of Tampa**

**Established 1963 as Bromeliad Guild of Tampa Bay**

**Meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of every month.**

**Plant sales at 6:30 p.m. Meeting at 7:00 p.m.**

**Informative programs, Show & Tell, plant sales, door prizes, raffle & refreshments**

**BTPST is affiliated with Bromeliad Society International, The Cryptanthus Society, Inc., Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies, Inc., and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota, FL.**





## Refreshments

Refreshments for the November meeting will be provided by Marcia and Rick Hunter and Richard Poole.



**November Birthdays - Happy Birthday to:** Marilyn Byram, Bill Carr, Clark Hull, Marcia Hunter and Anthony Pino



## Sunshine Greetings

Please notify Verna Dickey of any illness, surgery, birth of a child, death in the family, or other concerns you or another member may have.  
Call 813-244-3637 or email [vernadickey@aol.com](mailto:vernadickey@aol.com)

## Officers for 2023

**President:** Carol Wolfe 813-376-5251 [bromstudio@hotmail.com](mailto:bromstudio@hotmail.com)

**Secretary:** Steve Byram 813-361-4035 [byramsteve@gmail.com](mailto:byramsteve@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Rick Hunter 813-657-2305 [rg.hunter@verizon.net](mailto:rg.hunter@verizon.net)

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## Bromeliads Online

Bromeliad Guild of Tampa Bay [www.bromeliadguildoftampabay.org](http://www.bromeliadguildoftampabay.org)



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/366210778024864>

Bromeliad Society International— [www.bsi.org](http://www.bsi.org)

Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies— [www.fcbs.org](http://www.fcbs.org)

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens— [www.selby.org](http://www.selby.org)

Bromeliads Online - <http://www.bromeliads.co.nz/index.html>







The Bromeliad & Tropical Plant Society of Tampa was established in 1963 as the Bromeliad Guild of Tampa Bay. In July, 2022, it expanded its focus to include other tropical plants. BTPST is affiliated with the following: Bromeliad Society International, The Cryptanthus Society, Inc., Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies, Inc., and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota, FL.

When: Meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of every month.

Where: Woodmont Clubhouse, 415 Woodmont Ave., Temple Terrace, FL 33617

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Informative programs, workshops, Show & Tell, plant sales, door prizes, raffle & refreshments  
Visitors welcome!

**NEWSLETTER OF THE  
BROMELIAD &  
TROPICAL PLANT  
SOCIETY OF TAMPA  
21535 Northwood Dr.  
Lutz, Florida 33549**