

# FLORIDA WEST COAST BROMELIAD SOCIETY

1954-2020

*Celebrating over 67 Years in Bromeliads*

*fwcbs.org*



## January 2021 Newsletter

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### NEXT MEETING

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**Date:** Tuesday, January 5, 2021 CANCELLED

Our monthly meeting has been cancelled again due to the ongoing health concerns associated with the COVID-19 epidemic and the continued closure of the church campus where we meet.

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### HIGHLIGHTS

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This month's feature article is about a program Chester Skotak presented for the La Ballona Valley Bromeliad Society Zoom meeting in November 2020. Chester is an internationally known bromeliad grower and hybridizer, and he has collected bromeliads extensively throughout Central and South America. A leading expert in the field of bromeliad hybridization, he has introduced hundreds of bromeliad hybrids into horticulture and currently holds 100 bromeliad patents. Three bromeliad species have been named for him: *Guzmania skotakii* (Costa Rica), *Aechmea skotakii* (Ecuador) and *Vriesea skotakii* (Panama).



Chester Skotak with *Guzmania* 'Fortuna'

Chester has hybridized over 550 bromeliads, 500 of which are currently listed on the Bromeliad Society International (BSI) Bromeliad Cultivar Registry. The list is largely made up of the genus *Neoregelia* (433), followed by *Aechmea* (53) with *Ananas*, *Alcantarea*, *Guzmania*, and *Bromelia* making up the remainder. To see the list, use this link — <https://bsi.org/registry/> — and then scroll down to *Search the BCR* and search by the breeder name 'Skotak'. As you scan the list you might see names of hybrids you have in your collection or names that are familiar to you.

### Background

Chester has been working with plants for over 55 years, starting in his early teens. When Chester was in his late teens, his father built him a greenhouse. Born and raised in Texas, his early interest was in cactus; he became interested in bromeliads when he studied floriculture at Texas A&M University. In 1978, after spending a few years in Naples, Florida, he moved to Costa Rica, where he established his nursery, Dura Flor, S.A., located in Palmares, about 35 miles northwest of the capital city San Jose. The nursery has 2.5 acres of greenhouses and is situated about 3,300 feet above sea level where temperatures are steady year round. According to Chester, that altitude is ideal for growing plants, where it is always spring or summer, and neither too hot nor too cold. He admitted some natural disasters can occur, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and hurricanes, but these have not

been a major problem so far. He sells commercially in Costa Rica and sends plant material to Belgian laboratories for propagation, tissue culture, and commercial sales in Europe. He has a fondness for variegated plants and an extensive collection of rare and one-of-a-kind specimens.

Neoregelia

Chester works largely with the genus *Neoregelia* and has used *Neoregelia carolinae* in a lot of his crosses. Some of his popular *Neoregelia* hybrids include ‘Hannibal Lector’, ‘Milagro’, ‘Norman Bates’, ‘Yin’, and ‘Yang’. Below are pictures of some of the *Neoregelia* hybrids he showed in his presentation. [Note: All pictures in this article are from Chester’s talk and are used with his permission.]



*Neoregelia* 'Back Stabber'



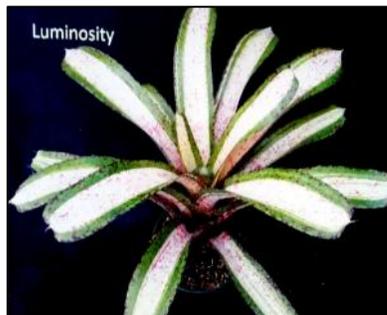
*Neoregelia* 'Crazy Rabbit'



*Neoregelia* 'Instant Karma'



*Neoregelia* 'Tantalizer'



*Neoregelia* 'Luminosity'



*Neoregelia* 'Lucifer'

Guzmania

Chester works a lot with *Guzmanias* because they are a popular house plant and thus commercially profitable, especially in the European market. After he has produced his hybrids, he sends seed pods to a laboratory in Belgium for reproduction and sales in Europe. He often makes 300 to 400 commercial varieties the lab will process as possibilities for sale; only a few of those make the final cut to a marketable product. Below are of examples of some of his *Guzmania* hybrids.



*Guzmania* 'Hope' (in Holland)



*Guzmania* 'Candy'



*Guzmania* 'Marcella' (in Holland)

*Guzmania* 'Fortuna' is a natural hybrid of *Guzmania lingulata* from northern Panama that was first collected in 1983 and subsequently by the late Harry Luther in 1986. Chester showed us the picture below on the left of an improved version of the plant that he said he created over time through selection and propagation. Chester is also producing miniature *Guzmanias* like the 18 miniatures (pictured below on the right) with *Guzmania* 'Theresa' in the cross.



*Guzmania* 'Fortuna'



Eighteen miniature crosses using *Guzmania* 'Theresa'

### Ananas comosus and Pineapples

Chester said he is current working to revolutionize pineapples, *Ananas comosus*. His aim is to produce a tasty commercial fruit that is also colorful, both inside and outside. When planning which plants to cross, he takes into consideration a number of factors that can determine what he feels will make a pineapple a marketable success. He screens plants first for good taste and then builds up from there, looking for other features such as color, weight, amount of dissolved sugar, and level of ascorbic acid to decide which plants to use.

He does only one cross per inflorescence, after which they cover the stalk (pictured below on the left) to avoid unwanted pollination by a natural pollinator. He has a commercial research pineapple farm at his nursery (pictured below in the center and on the right) with about 50,000 plants growing right now, each plant genetically different and all spineless. Out of the thousands he creates, maybe 10 will be marketable.



Pollinating and covering pineapple



Fields of pineapple hybrids



Below are pictures of the red, yellow and pink colors Chester has achieved.



Colorful pineapple hybrids, inside and outside

Chester is also producing colorful miniature pineapples. He makes 2,000 to 3,000 red miniatures a year, and sends about 10 to 15 of those to Europe for growing, of which maybe one is selected for the commercial market. His spineless miniature *Ananas* 'Mini Me' (picture on the right) is a proven commercial success and has sold world wide.



*Ananas* 'Mini Me'

Alcantarea

According to Chester, there are a number of marginated *Alcantarea* growing in the wild, such as *Alcantarea* 'P.I.T.A.' (pictured below on the left). It is a natural cultivar of *Alcantarea extensa* that he, along with Rafael Oliveira and Pedro Nahoum, collected in Brazil about 25 to 30 years ago. It is easy to grow and a good pupper. He said that there are many varieties of *Alcantarea imperialis* found in Brazil but they are rarely marginated. In 1998, he received one that was partially variegated; through selection and propagation, over time he produced from it a hybrid with a wide stripe that he named *Alcantarea* 'Skotak's Big Bang' (pictured below on the right). *Alcantarea* makes great landscape plants, but the majority of them become quite large and need a lot of room to grow.



*Alcantarea* 'P.I.T.A.'



*Alcantarea* 'Skotak's Big Bang'

In addition to working with *Neoregelia*, *Guzmania*, *Ananas*, and *Alcantarea*, Chester has created a number of *Aechmea* and *Bromelia* hybrids, along with bigeneric hybrids, discussed below.

Aechmea

Below are pictures of some of Chester's *Aechmea* hybrids.



*Aechmea* 'Yellow Fever'



Miniature *Aechmea fasciata*, spineless



*Aechmea flavorosea* x *Aechmea fasciata* spineless

## Bromelia

Chester said that the genus *Bromelia* grows commonly in Brazil and in many forms. It is a tough plant with abundant spines but is easy to grow, and he feels it should be more commonly grown in culture than it is currently. It is pollinated by a moth with a proboscis shaped so that it can reach the pollen in the flower, a shape he has to imitate in order to extract pollen when hybridizing this genus. On the right is one of Chester's hybrids, *Bromelia* 'Alien Eye' (*Bromelia villosa* x *Bromelia rosea*).



*Bromelia* 'Alien Eye'

## Bigeneric Hybrids

Below are pictures of some of Chester's bigeneric hybrids he showed in his program.



X *Vriecantarea* 'Geoffrey Lawn'



X *Guzvriesea*



X *Guzvriesea*



*Vriesea* x *Goudaea*  
'Supernatural'

## Growing from Seeds

Chester described the following techniques he uses when growing hybrids from seeds.

- After plants are pollinated, they are placed in a secure screened-in area to prevent unwanted additional fertilization by an errant natural pollinator. Once seed pods are produced, they are collected (Figure 1 below).
- The seeds inside the pod have a gel coating, a natural protection to prevent germination and fungal growth. Chester squeezes the seeds from a pod into water (Figure 2 below) and soaks them for five to six days, to allow the gel to fall off. He changes the water frequently to keep it fresh.
- After the gel is removed, he dries the seeds and places them on a growing medium (he uses tree fern bark) in plastic cereal bowls (Figure 3 below). He punches holes in the bottom of the bowls (before they are filled) to allow water to drain.
- It is essential to keep seeds from specific pods separated from other seeds and to label them (Figure 3 below) as they move through the process in order to keep good records.
- The bowls with the seeds are covered with plastic bags (Figure 4 below) to hold in moisture and they are then placed in a location away from light to wait for the seeds to sprout.
- After the seedlings sprout (Figure 5 below), they are uncovered and moved into pots. When they have attained some size, the pots are moved into the sun.

- He occasionally fertilizes the seedlings, but takes the precaution of flushing the fertilizer off the plants after 15 minutes so that it does not encourage fungal growth. He uses Osmocote for Aechmeas and Neoregelias but not Guzmanias, Tillandsia and Vriesea. He said that if you are using pellets they will be too strong unless you first wash off their outer coating and dry them in the sun before application.



1. Ripe *Neoregelia* seed pods



2. Seeds soaking in water



3. Seeds in tree fern bark



4. Plastic bag covers



5. Sprouted seedlings



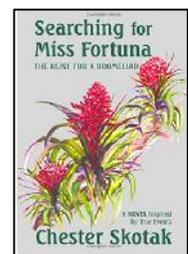
Chester emphasized the importance and necessity of being very selective about keeping only the best plants that might show promise and being ruthless about discarding the undesirables. He rejects thousands of plants every year if they do not work out for him. It has taken him up to 35 years to get a particular plant he wants. He asserted that there is no such thing as a dead end; one just needs to try another way to get at the desired final product.

### Approach/Viewpoint

Chester said he enjoys the challenges of his work and explained his approach to what he considers his hobby. He is always looking for plants that can help him produce better plants, he strives to keep wild genes in the mix to maintain diversity, and he will not release inferior plants. His goal is to get plants that stand out, and while some might look similar, they do have different features that collectors can see and appreciate. His aims are to promote the hobby and plants, to give back to the hobby, and to encourage people to follow their dream when they believe in what they want to do.

### Publications

Chester has written numerous articles for the BSI Journal, his first one in 1975 titled *Collecting Variegated Bromeliads*. He has also written a book titled *Searching for Miss Fortuna* (picture on the right), which is a fictional account of an obsessive hunt for a rare bromeliad. Described by one reviewer as a bizarre and offbeat story, Chester has said it was inspired by a



true event, which might be a reference to his personal efforts in the field to find *Guzmania* 'Fortuna' in its natural habitat in northern Panama.

Chester gave his permission to use information and pictures from his presentation for this article. It was packed with over 250 pictures with 90 that show some of his hybrids, 50 of which are *Neoregelia*. If you want to see the full presentation, go to this YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzFBN151fEs>.

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## THIS AND THAT

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### Lost, then Found

A few months ago I discovered in the yard a clump of what turned out to be *Nidularium procerum* cv. 'Stripes' (identical to *Nid. procerum* but with the addition of red striping on the leaves.) I acquired the original plant in 2011 from the garden of the late Dr. Helen Dexter, brought it home, potted it, and proceeded to move it around the yard over the years as it multiplied. In the process, I forgot I had the plant (sound familiar?); it became out of sight, out of mind. (In my defense, the inflorescence grows low in the center, surrounded by tall leaves, so that with a casual glance it appears to be just another green *Aechmea* that refuses to bloom.)

While one of the newly discovered plants produced a healthy inflorescence (picture below on left), the inflorescence on another plant in the clump appeared to have been eaten by something (picture below on right). My mind always goes straight to squirrels as the likely culprits for such things. I asked Terrie Bert about it and she suggested it was more likely snails. She said they like the centers best, probably because there is water in that area and the foliage there is young and tender. She added that there are several snail species that can be abundant in residential gardens.



*Nidularium procerum* cv. "Stripes"

### Bromeliad Christmas Tree

Member Nancy Schmidt submitted the picture on the right of a Christmas tree constructed with bromeliads that she spotted at the Naples Botanical Gardens last month.



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## IN THE GARDEN THIS MONTH

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*Aechmea phanerophlebia*



*Vriesea* 'Eternal'  
(not registered)

### BROMELIAD AND OTHER PLANT EVENTS, 2021

March 26-28, Tropiflora's 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Spring Festival

Tropiflora Nursery, 3530 Tallavast Road, Sarasota, 941-351-2267  
(<https://tropiflora.com/pages/events>)

April 10-11, USF Botanical Gardens Spring Plant Sale

University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/botanical-gardens/>)

June 8-12, 24<sup>th</sup> World Bromeliad Conference, *The Big Show*

Celebrate BSI's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Sarasota  
(<https://www.bsi.org/new/conference-corner>)

June 19-20, USF Botanical Gardens Summer Plant Sale

University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/botanical-gardens/>)

October 9-10, USF Botanical Gardens Fall Plant Sale

University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/botanical-gardens/>)

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