

Gainesville Bromeliad Society Meeting Minutes - February 22, 2026

Brian Dey called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm. He welcomed the 29 attendees, which included one visitor, Sandy Pozzetta. There was no silent auction, but the speaker brought a wide variety of bromeliads for members to admire and purchase.

Steve introduced the guest speaker, Jason Mellica. Jason, a UF Botany graduate, is the President of the Sarasota Bromeliad Society. He's spent over 30 years growing bromeliads, is a bromeliad hybridizer, and owner of Advanced Bromeliads. Last month, we started the year off with a bromeliad basics session and Jason's talk today will continue in the general information vein.

Jason briefly traced the development of bromeliads from a single source 100 million years ago on the supercontinent, Pangaea. The African and Brazilian plates slid apart and the topography of the new continents changed over millions of years, causing the Bromeliaceae family speciation. Bromeliads easily evolved to thrive in many environments. Most are epiphytic, though some are terrestrial. The most wide-spread of all, *Tillandsia usneoides* or Spanish moss, can be found from Argentina to Virginia. Of the 8 Bromeliaceae subfamilies, Tillandsioideae is the largest. It includes *Guzmania* and *Vriesea*. The subfamily, Bromelioideae is the most diverse and includes many of the most commonly grown Bromeliads today, including *Neoregelia*, *Aechmea*, *Ananas*, *Bilbergia*, to name a few.

Jason said you can tell a lot about the conditions needed for a bromeliad to thrive by observing it. Plants with soft foliage can't take as much sun or cold as those with thick, tougher foliage. For instance, the species *Neoregelia cruenta*, with its compact form, thick, and spiny leaves can take sun, drought, cold, and is not tempting to animals. Many bromeliads have developed silver trichomes to absorb water and protect the plant from the sun. They would need misting while those with center tanks need water in the tank. *Dyckia* and *Puya* are two cold-hardy types. Hybridizers are busy creating new plants more appealing to the public. *Aechmea fasciata*, a well-known and loved species was spiny. Now there is a spine-less cultivar, *Aechmea fasciata* 'Primera'!

Plants were lost in this area following the recent hard freeze. Members asked what to do about cold-damaged plants and how to prevent future cold-damage. Jason said to cut the cold damaged leaf off where the damage starts or take the whole leaf off as low as you can if it is all damaged. If the plant is green in the center, it may come back or pup. Stab the plant in the center with a sharp metal rod to force pupping. His best advice for preventing frost damage is to bring the plants inside. If you can't do that, cover them with a cotton sheet or frost cloth, not plastic; gather them under trees where it is warmer and the canopy will take the frost; put them near the house or in a carport to protect them from the wind. He's heard of people using Christmas tree lights to keep them warm under covers. A member commented that they would have to be the old variety that generates heat.

Jason gave advice on various areas of bromeliad care.

- Water once a week, more often in summer. Any water is okay if it is dry, but rainwater is best as it has nitrogen in it. Don't water house bromeliads in the center tank as they don't have the air flow they'd have outside and may rot.
- Fertilizer- he recommends natural like fish emulsion or a low number like 13-13-13. 20-20-20 is too strong. Dilute to a quarter strength and add to the water.
- Potting mixture - Jason uses mostly peat moss with a little pine bark, perlite and charcoal added. The charcoal adds some carbon to the soil while helping aerate it. Good drainage is very important. Perlite can get too old. If it has become sandy, invest in some new material. Lava rock is good, also.
- Light - thick foliage plants can take more light. Research the plant.

A short business meeting followed Jason's talk.

- Brian introduced Leo Hernandez, our talented artist club member who brought his beautiful drawing of *Tillandsia flexuosa* for show and tell. Leo said though it is a Florida native, it is very tropical and difficult to find, usually requiring a canoe or kayak to locate. He was fortunate to observe one in the wild in Big Cypress and based his drawing on it.
- Brian asked for a motion to approve the January minutes. There was a motion to approve, it was seconded and all approved.
- Mary gave the treasurer's report. As of 2/11 we have \$1,292.02 in checking and \$4,066.62 in savings. Mary is collecting 2026 dues. They are \$20 for individuals and for couples they are \$25.
- Steve said the March meeting will be held at the Tower Road library branch since our room at Millhopper is not available. The guest speaker will be Marty Baxley. The April speaker will be Ray Lemieux.
- The rained-out Gainesville Garden Club plant sale has been rescheduled for March 8th from 12-4 at First Magnitude Brewery. Brian and Bob will handle the sale as Steve will be out of town. Steve asked for a volunteer to pick up and transport his plants to the sale. Doug Phillips volunteered. Steve asked for volunteers to help out at the sale.
- Steve reminded all of upcoming events
 - April 14 - 18 World Bromeliad Conference in California.
 - Fall plant sale at the Equestrian Center will be October 17 from 9 - 4. The main speaker will be Brie Arthur, known as "The Plant Lady" on YouTube. She is big on integrating edibles with yard-scaping.

The raffle followed. Thanks to all who contributed a plant, everyone went home with a freebie. The meeting was adjourned at 3:24pm