

Beautiful Bromeliads

By Andrew Maloy

AVAILABLE IN A RANGE OF EYE-catching flowers and amazing foliage colors, bromeliads are popular potted plants in many countries. And they make great landscape plants, too, in frost-free gardens, malls and atriums. Unlike many other potted plants, bromeliads have a relatively long shelf life, and their low care and maintenance demands make them a pleasure to have on the shelf.

Flowering Varieties

Flowering potted bromeliads include such beauties as the gorgeous pink-flowering *aechmeas*, and the *guzmanias*, *tillandsias* and *vrieseas* in their many colors. Grown under controlled nursery conditions, they are treated to bring them into flower, and so they are available almost year round as well as for the main holiday and festive seasons.

To keep flowering potted bromeliads in tip-top condition



BROMELIAD BOUNTY Colored foliage bromeliads, of the *Vriesea* genus, growing in Auckland, New Zealand.

in the shop, give them **plenty of light, but away from direct sun, and don't overwater**. These plants only need water when the mix is dry to the touch. If humidity is very low, you could give an **occasional misting of water** over the foliage, but in most situations this isn't necessary.

Colored Foliage Varieties

This group includes *neoregelias* and some *vriesea* species such as the 'king of bromeliads' (*Vriesea hieroglyphica*), hybrid *vrieseas* like 'Red Chestnut' and 'Vista', as well as some exciting new *vriesea* varieties becoming available from breeders around the world,

including the United States and New Zealand. Strictly speaking, *neoregelias* should be in the flowering group but their flowers are very insignificant — it's the colorful ring of leaves surrounding the small flower cluster in the center of the plant that catches the eye. These bromeliads have the same care requirements in the shop as their flowering counterparts: **light, but not direct sun, little water and occasionally, in low humidity, foliage misting**.

Bromeliad Hints to Pass On

In addition to their flowers or colorful foliage, customers will love the plants for their longevity, too, as long as you can educate them about the long-term care requirements:

Light — Tell customers to find a spot for the plant where it will receive light, but not direct sun.

Temperature — Ideally, plants should be kept above 50°F in warm, frost-free areas. They flourish in the garden outdoors or as container plants on the deck or patio. Once established, some varieties can tolerate lower temperatures.

Watering — Allow the mix to dry a little before watering. Remind customers that the plants should never be left standing in a saucer of water. Make sure there is some water in the central cup formed by the rosette of leaves. Put the plants out in the rain occasionally to wash dust from the leaves — a good rain soaking works wonders for all pot plants.

Air flow — No need to worry here: Potted bromeliads are quite tolerant of draughts.

A final tip to pass on? After flowering, you can cut out the old flower spike. With many varieties, new shoots from the base of the plant should grow and in time also flower. 🌿

Red Dragon Know-How

How do you handle Red Dragon, the cut bromeliad featured in Fresh Choices (p. 16)? When you get Red Dragon stems to your shop, the stems should be recut and placed in **pure, clean cool water**. Chlorinated water is acceptable, as this will minimize bacteria, molds and fungi in the water and will also help to keep the stems from browning. While the stems are hydrating, **do not add post-harvest food** — this can cause the leaves to turn yellow very quickly. And, if the stems are going to be used in arrangements with other flowers that need vase additives, it is best to remove all the leaves — strip them off the stem carefully, as small pieces of leaf material left on the stem will turn brown as it dies.

Red Dragon likes **humidity and warmth**. Misting the leaves and flower heads will keep them fresher in very dry regions. **Do not put Red Dragon in a cooler** — they should be kept in temperatures higher than 45°F. Flower heads are very tough — they can deal with quite a bit of handling, so encourage customers to feel its interesting texture. 🌿

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