



# Sharon's Plants, Ltd.

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## Care and Cultivation of Bromeliads

**Bromeliads** are survivors. As long as they have access to water, they will grow quite well with a little human help or interference. We pot them for our convenience – so that they can stand upright and be transported. Remember that they are epiphytes; we need to provide them with a fast draining media. This can be a mixture of peat/perlite, bark chips, cinders and or coconut mix or even gravel. Planting level should come up to the base of the plant – do not plant past the bottom leaves. Make sure to balance the plant in the center of the pot for stability. Compress the potting media firmly around the base of the stem, so that the plant is firmly secure and stands up well in place. This is particularly important if you are planting a pup with little or no roots!

**Water** newly planted plants immediately after planting, as the leaf bases usually lose their water reserves during the planting process, you don't want them to wilt and collapse. Once the bottom leaves collapse from wilt, they will not stand back up when watered and will need to be removed. It takes approximately 6 weeks to grow a new leaf, losing several leaves from insufficient watering can set your plant back substantially.

**Granular** fertilizers and insecticides can be applied at this time and your plant is ready for just routine watering. This consists of filling up its water reserve about 2 or 3 times a week – depending upon the amount of rainfall in your area if your plants are outside. Do not keep the roots wet and soggy, as this can cause the plant to rot off. Remember the roots serve primarily to anchor the plant in place – water is absorbed through the leaf bases and very little is absorbed from the roots.

**Fertilizing** – Bromeliads do quite well without additional fertilizing. The micro climate they create with their water cups encourages birds, insects, frogs and lizards to drink from their water cups and thus receive a certain amount of food from the droppings. Newly planted pups benefit from some additional fertilizer to get their root systems developed and leaf formation initiated. This can be done sparingly, with a granular formulation such as 14-14-14 or 16-16-16. If you prefer to use a liquid formulation, cut the dosage down to about ¼ of the recommended rate for regular plants and apply every 2 weeks to 1 month intervals. (Miracle Grow or Peters Fertilizers). Once a plant is ½ to ¾ mature, fertilizing should be stopped to allow the plant to reach its full color and beauty.

**Insects** – Bromeliads get a bad rap from the uninformed as being mosquito breeding plants. Mosquitoes breed only in stagnant water. If your bromeliads have stagnant water in them – they are not being properly cared for. Regular flushing out the cups either by rain or regular watering, keeps the water in the cups fresh and clean and mosquitoes cannot breed there. If you have problems with scale or white flies on your bromeliads (usually occurring on back side of the leaves) this is most likely caused by ant infestations. Scale and mealy bugs are farmed by ants and taken from one plant to the other by the ants, which feed on the residue produced by the insects. Control ants with the various types of ant baits and kill off the insects with an insecticide. I prefer to use either Orthene, which is applied as a liquid spray or Marathon which is granular and is applied to the base of the plant. Both of these are what is known as systemic, which means they are incorporated into the plants system and lasts for approximately 3 months. Place your plants in filtered light – thinner leaved varieties require more shade (Vrieseas & Guzmanias) where Neoregelia and Aechmeas can take more sunlight. Then sit back and enjoy your beautiful Bromeliads!

*Sharon Petersen*