Far North Coast Bromeliad Study Group N.S.W.

Edition: November 2025

Agenda: General Discussion

Venue: PineGrove Bromeliad Nursery
114 Pine Street Wardell 2477

Phone (02) 6683 4188

Study Group meets the third Thursday of each month

Next meeting December 18th 2025 at 11 a.m.

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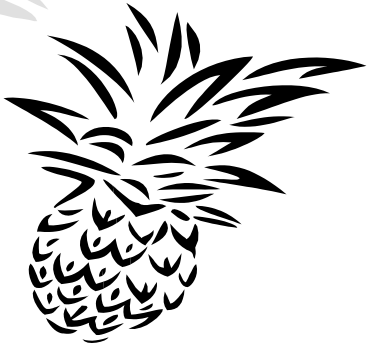
Life Members: Gary McAteer, Coral McAteer
Debbie Smith, Shirley Smith
Ross Little, Helen Clewett



Meeting October 16th 2025

The meeting was opened at approximately 11.00 am
Nine members were welcomed.
Four apologies were received.

General Business

Some discussion for changes to our 2026 Popular Vote Competition were had this month. Being a Group of members with mostly small but growing collections, support at a genus level seems to be limited to only a few members that have larger, mixed collections. It is felt this is limiting the number of members entering plants in the specified genus sections each month. To be more inclusive for all members, it has been suggested to drop the Monthly Genus section altogether and increase the number of entries per person in the Open section from one plant to two plants per entrant. To help maintain variety of entries it would be preferred to see mixed entries rather than two of the same genus from each entrant e.g, two Neoregelia or two Vriesea etc, this will not be a set rule, it will be your choice. It might be called a competition but it's not all about winning, it's about being involved, learning by exchanging cultural tips and of course, a brag session, show off your growing achievements. Have fun and participate in 2026.

Open Popular Vote: two plants per entrant.

Tillandsia Popular Vote: one plant per entrant.

Christmas is almost upon us, we need to start planning the end of year party, food and drinks. Popular Vote point scores need to be tallied and trophies to be ordered at the end of the competition period of January to November meetings. Fortunately we pretty much repeat the same activities each year so not a great panic. Helen will put together another quiz which always brings joy and laughter as some of those questions are not that simple, quite puzzling actually.

Join in the 'Gift Swap', bring a gift — receive a gift. The gift swap draw is quite simple, the more meetings one has attended the earlier in the draw your name is called out to receive a swap. If you have attended all 11 meetings in 2025 prior to our Christmas party you're at the top of the draw, I'm sure there are a few of us so you'll need to be quick off the mark. If you have only attended three meetings there's a pretty good chance you're nearest the last call-out.

We all have some spare/excess plants in our collections, so lets all get involved and enjoy each others company.

Yes I know, wowsers here but please, no alcohol *!*

Show, Tell and Ask!

Use of fertilizer to hasten growth for both plant size and offset production was discussed at our October meeting with many suggestions being offered.

If you want good plants you must feed them.

- Fertilize in spring for strong growth.
- Fertilize in autumn to strengthen plants to help them get through winter.
- A 9 month slow release fertilizer is recommended when potting.
- If foliar fertilizing (liquid feeding) make it weak (1/2 strength) and do it weekly.
- The pH of your potting mix can affect nutrient uptake in plants, check your pH with a soil test kit occasionally before fertilizing.

Dust on our plants from dust storms which can travel great distances raised some concerns. Much of the dust that lands on plants contains fertilizer (fine particles of pulverized animal poo) so don't wash the dust off but gently water it into your plants or they will lose this free air-born fertilizer.

To speed up mass offset production to form larger colonies/clumps, fertilize your plant after it has finished flowering by foliar feeding and adding some slow release fertilizer to the potting mix. You can add a prill or two (the little round slow release fertilizer balls) to each leaf axil to encourage offset growth. Only ever add fertilizer prills to the centre of a Bromeliad after it has finished flowering as doing so at any other time may initiate burning to the delicate growth point.

Can you feed plants too much?
Yes you can, is the answer if you do not match the available light and watering with your feeding you will end up with elongated, soft growth and seemingly unattractive plants. This will happen when giving large doses of fertilizer to help gain those extra offsets to form colonies/clumps especially with Billbergias and Neoregelias. Two things will happen, elongated growth/form and loss of colour, however as the fertilizer is used up by the plants do not feed again to regain both colour and form/shape. Set up your own experiments, to show different growth rates, be specific about your fertilizing or lack of, light and potting mix. Report the results to the Group so that we can learn from each others efforts.

An article to refer to on this subject of feeding plants is **A Matter of Energy** by Chris Larson printed in two parts in our FNCBSG Newsletters September and October 2013.

Les Higgins has compiled some extensive notes on the topic of Plants, Minerals and pH in past issues of our Newsletter that can be found in Club News, 5, on the Bromeliads in Australia web site: http://bromeliad.org.au/ click on HERE, go to Articles, expand the drop box and open Fertilizing Bromeliads to find articles.

Bromeliads growing in your gardens generally don't need supplemental fertilizing like your pot grown plants in your shade house as those in the garden break down leaves and other detritus that falls in their leaf axils from surrounding trees and shrubs and even insects add to the soup. It has generally be considered that Bromeliads tied in trees only use their roots as holdfasts. Not so, it is now considered that their root development has changed to absorbing some nutrients available to them via the humus which builds up around the base of the plants. Plants that do need regular fertilizing are those that have small or no root system for example many Tillandsias.

Plants grown in an improved environment such as a glasshouse that lengthens their growing season need feeding, this must occur under the right conditions, there is no point heavily feeding if the plant is in a poor environment. At one of our FNCNSG meetings Bill Morris gave an example: "A grower in Rockhampton was producing the biggest Cryptanthus he had ever seen. It was accomplished using a small plastic house inside a normal glasshouse and placing the plants near the roof. This together with the watering regime produced a very tropical situation. Heavy fertilising on top of this produced the giant Cryptanthus."

Large green plants, those that don't colour in high light, are grown for their flower spikes e.g. Vriesea and Guzmania, these need a good, regular feeding regime to be at their best. Usually the bigger plants like Alcantarea require more feed to attain the bigger flower spike/inflorescence that they produce. Err on the lighter side as overfeeding can cause many problems, especially to those that should not be fertilised like Neoregelia and Billbergia that are grown for their colour, shape and general appearance. Unless after high offset production.

Many barred, banded and coloured plants will not lose colour or barring when fertilized e.g. a lot of *Aechmea, Vriesea* and *Tillandsia*. Some variegated plants such as *Edmundoa* 'Alvim Seidel' (was *Canistrum lindenii* variegated) may reduce or totally lose variegations. It appears to depend on the number of functioning chloroplasts within the cells within the leaves, as to whether or not the variegation will disappear, variegation often returns as the fertilizer is used up. Those plants with clean clear white variegation (no chloroplasts and hence no chlorophyll) may be fertilised with no degradation of the variegation.

Remember when comparing your plants to another grower's plants, we all grow differently regarding light and our fertilizing regimes or lack of, hence variability in size, shape and colour.

In your garden move plants around until you find their preferred microclimate, a bit of trial and error to acclimatize some to full sun, this may take a few seasons.

Remember patience is a virtue.

Monthly Genus for October was Billbergia

Billbergia is a genus of the subfamily Bromelioideae, it was named by Carl Peter Thunburg in 1821 for the Swedish botanist, Gustaf Johan Billberg. Thunburg named the type form of the species *Billbergia speciosa* in 1821 which is the original collected plant that the botanical description is written. The 63 species, 34 varieties (var.) and 1 forma (f) are native to the forest and scrub up to an altitude of 1700 metres in southern Mexico, the West Indies, Central America and South America, with many species endemic to Brazil. They are rosette forming, usually epiphytic and cylindrical in habit, often with brilliantly coloured bracts and flowers albeit short lived.

The genus is divided into two subgenera:
Billbergia:- type - *Billbergia speciosa* Thunburg 1821.


Billbergia speciosa
painting by
Margaret Mee

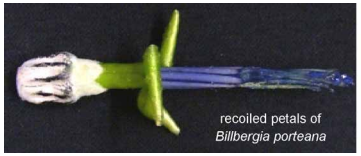
Petals loosely recurved if at all at anthesis, contorted afterward, inflorescences often compound, their axes often glabrous.


recurved petals of
Billbergia amoena var. *viridis*

Some subgenera Billbergia in our collections:
amoena, chlorantha, distachia, elegans, euphemiae, fosteriana, horrida, iridifolia, leptopoda, lietzii, nutans, pyramidalis, reichardtii, sanderiana, vittata.

Helicodea:- type - *Helicodea baraquinia* Lemaire 1864, now *Billbergia decora.*

Petals recoiled in a tight helicoid spiral at anthesis and afterward. The inflorescences are always simple, densely farinose except in cases of suspected hybrids.


recoiled petals of
Billbergia porteana

Some subgenera Helicodea in our collections:
alfonsi-joannis, brasiliensis, formosa, incarnata, magnifica, meyeri, microlepis, oxysepala, porteana, rosea, stenopetala, tessmannii, violacea, zebrina.

This group with the helicoid petals are often referred to as the "Watch Spring" Bromeliads due to their petals being tightly coiled like a watch spring.

Billbergia ‘Kawana Pizzazz’ unreg.
1st Monthly Genus Shane Fitzgerald

Billbergia sanderiana
grown by Ross Little

Billbergia ‘Grand Finale’
grown by Kayelene Guthrie

Billbergia ‘Hallelujah’
grown by
Helen Clewett

Billbergia ‘Domingos Martins’
grown by
Ross Little

Billbergia amoena
var. *viridis*
grown by
Ross Little

Neoregelia 'Dyn-O-Mite'
grown by Kayelene Guthrie

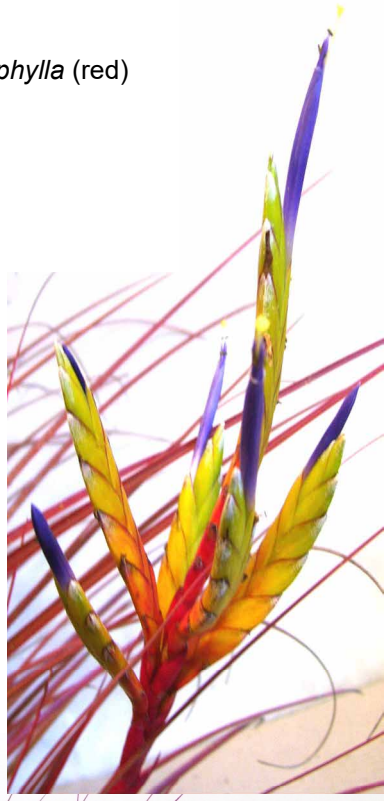
Vriesea 'El Supremo'
1st Open
and
Judges Choice
Ross Little

Vriesea 'Stars and Stripes'
grown by
Shane Fitzgerald

Aechmea 'Vaquero'
grown by Helen Clewett

Billbergia alfonsi-joannis
grown by Ross Little

Tillandsia streptophylla (red)
1st Tillandsia
Shane Fitzgerald



Tillandsia rodriegueziana 1st Tillandsia Ross Little

Tillandsia schiediana
grown by
Kayelene Guthrie

Tillandsia var. *densispica*
grown by Gary McAteer

x*Vrieslandsia*
'Inca Chief'
grown by
Helen Clewett

22nd Australasian Bromeliad Conference

Exploring Diversity and Beauty -- Aussie Broms 2025

The Conference has come and gone and what an outstanding event it was.

Two of our FNCBSG members Mitch Jones and Michelle Hartwell entered plants in the judged competition with both receiving good results.

This was Michelle's first major competition entry and she shared in a two way split for the **Delegates Choice Award** with her *Billbergia* 'Hallelujah'. Congratulations Michelle.

Neoregelia 'Deep Space'
Michelle Hartwell

Alcantareas
Mitch Jones

Encholirium agavoides
Mitch Jones

Congratulations also to Mitch who did very well in his first major competition with his Alcantareas, Cryptanthus, Deuterochonias, Dyckias, Encholiriums and xPuckia.

Photos by Michelle Hartwell and Mitch Jones

An excellent line-up of guest speakers kept the audience captivated with barely an empty seat in the auditorium at all times.

Leonardo Versieux author of: Alcantarea, Giant Bromeliads from Brazil. Leonardo spoke of the distribution of the genus Alcantarea in Brazil and what has motivated him to be involved in the world of Bromeliads.

Reginald Deroose explained the history of the family nursery growing ferns, anthuriums and bromeliads to becoming a bromeliad only nursery and how the introduction of tissue culture brought only the best selections to market.

Dylan Zoller first up took us on a photographic tour of Central and Western Colombia showing us some amazing plants he saw along his journey. Then he took us on tour of the jewels of the Brazilian highlands.

Pamela Koide-Hyatt told of her travels with Professor Werner Rauh and their plant hunting expeditions in Peru. Rauh was a Professor at the University of Heidelberg and Director of the Heidelberg Botanic Gardens, his specialty of course being bromeliads.

Bruce Holst and Bromeliads of the Lost World, travels through Belize exploring some of the cenotes, natural sink holes and caves, finding some wonderful new plants. This presentation brought back some memories of our time in Belize.

Chester Skotak and the bromeliad world as he sees it. Chester explained his pineapple hybridizing program and selection process. He gave us a visual feast of the many hybrids that he has created over the decades that he is famous for.

Graeme Barclay the Bromeliad Cultivar Registrar discussed where he is up to with the Bromeliad Cultivar Registry which is almost up to date now. He also explained how to navigate the Bromeliad Species Database and its features.

Mal Cameron showed the ups and downs of developing a nursery from shade house construction to destruction by storms. On the brighter side he took us through the years of his foliage Vriesea hybridizing programs and plant imports.

Andrew Devonshire is a hybridizer and creative artist of mini Neoregelias who took us along his journey explaining what he was looking for in a plant and why he chose the parents he used to create some of his wonderful new hybrids.

Apart from the speakers presentations there were the sales tables which were extremely well stocked - I suspect many plants have found new homes!

To further deplete our wallets there was also a Rare plant auction!

There were three garden visits - Stan and Jane Walkley, Peter and Denise Ball and Rob and Barbara Murray. We could see a lot of effort had gone into there presentation and we certainly weren't disappointed.

To Feed or Not to Feed

Taken from: BSI Journal — 1962, Vol.12 (2)

When this writer first started to grow bromeliads about twenty years ago, fertilizing these plants was not considered necessary. It was believed that because bromeliads were epiphytes, they did not need feeding as did regular plants that had their roots in the ground. Little by little, however, the fallacy of this way of thinking became apparent, until today about ninety percent of those who grow bromeliads feed them at regular intervals. In their need for minerals vital to their existence, bromeliads are no different from other plants. Marston Bates in his fascinating book *The Forest and the Sea* brings out this point and makes some interesting comments on the air plants which grow in the tropical rain forests of South America. As these plants have no direct access to the ground, they are faced with the great problem of obtaining enough food and water to keep them alive. Bromeliads, Mr. Bates tells us, are fortunate in having solved this problem by the formation of their leaves into water-tight tanks, which make first-rate containers for water and rotting organic matter. In fact, bromeliads can hold so much water that they have been referred to as "marshes in the treetops."

It is the common belief that the roots of epiphytes serve only as a means of supporting the plant to the host tree. According to Mr. Bates, the roots of bromeliads and other air plants are also a means of absorbing food. This food may be obtained from the humus or debris that may collect in cracks in the bark of the tree or from the fungi which are found living in close relationship with the roots of many plants. As many plant explorers well know, the roots of epiphytes also serve as the nesting sites for ants, which Mr. Bates says benefit the plant in two ways. First, the material which the ants collect to build their nests acts as food for the plant, and second, the ants provide a means of defence for the plant against those avid human beings who desire to bring the plant home to their greenhouse.

If our bromeliads need food in their native habitat, it would most certainly seem that they need fertilizing when brought under cultivation. For those who grow their bromeliads outdoors on trees or in the ground, feeding is probably not necessary; but for those who must raise their plants in pots under artificial conditions, fertilizing must be resorted to if the plant is to reach its optimum beauty. Practically all the members who feed their bromeliads use a liquid form, weakly diluted. What kinds of fertilizers are used? The answers most frequently submitted were as follows: "Anything I have around the house," "the same as I feed my orchids," fish emulsion, Orthogro, Rapid-grow, and Hyponex. It would seem from the wide diversity of answers that "anything goes" so far as feeding is concerned, as long as the fertilizer is a well-balanced one and is applied at regular intervals.

The Fibonacci Sequence and Pineapples

by John Catlan

Look at any plant - tomato, strawberry or pineapple, count the number of petals, or the way the leaves are arranged. You will find them set out in pairs, threes, fives, eights or thirteens, but never fours. Plants don't like four.

Plants stick to numbers in the series 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34 where each number comes from adding the previous two together. The series is called The Fibonacci Sequence. Mathematicians love this string of numbers, as do plants. You will find these numbers in the five seed chambers you find when you cut across an apple, or the 34 or 55 spiral whorls in a sunflower head. We do not have four leafed clover or a four-leafed anything else.

Phyllotaxis: Arrangement of Leaves on Stem

In the following, note how the Fibonacci Sequence seems to rule: the flowers of a pineapple and thus bromeliads have three petals.

When I seriously started to look at the shape of Neoregelias and what made the shape appealing and what was right for the plant, the work on pineapples was the bench mark to copy. Once you understand how leaf shape is formed you do not have to strip a plant, you can line up leaves and count, but I will explain in detail.

The leaf phyllotaxy can be determined by removal of the leaves and marking the growth bud at the base of the leaf then noting the number of leaves which have to be removed before another leaf bud appears on a line on the stem extending vertically above the first number bud, and also noting the number of spirals that have been made around the stem. We find the leaf phyllotaxy is 5/13. The five is the number of spirals around the stem and thirteen the number of leaves removed in the five spirals until another bud, the fourteenth is found directly above bud number one.

When a pineapple is formed hormones change the phyllotaxy from 5/13 of the leaves to 8/21 of the fruit. In normal fruit the number of rows of each type of spiral is constant, there being eight of the long gently sloping rows and thirteen of short steep ones.

The fruit hormones cuts out and the phyllotaxy changes from 8/21 of the fruit to 5/13 of the leaves abnormalities in fruit and top development, such as double fruit, fan tops, multiple tops are the results of irregularities in these hormone driven phyllotaxis change.

Open Popular Vote

1st	Ross Little	*Vriesea* 'El Supremo'
2nd	Shane Fitzgerald	*Vriesea* 'Stars and Stripes'
3rd	Helen Clewett	*Aechmea* 'Vaquero'

Tillandsia

1st	Ross Little	*Tillandsia rodrieugeziana*
1st	Shane Fitzgerald	*Tillandsia streptophylla* (red)
2nd	Gary McAteer	*Tillandsia fasciculata* var. *densispica*
3rd	Helen Clewett	x*Vrieslandsia* 'Inca Chief'

Monthly Genus

1st	Shane Fitzgerald	*Billbergia* 'Kawana Pizzazz' unreg.

Judges Choice

1st	Ross Little	*Vriesea* 'El Supremo'

Web Links for Checking Correct Identification and Spelling ?

Bromeliad Cultivar Register (BCR): http://registry.bsi.org/
Refer to this site for correct identification and spelling of your hybrid or cultivar.

Bromeliad Species Database (BSD): www.bsi.org/members/?bsd
Refer to this site for species identification, photos, descriptions and more.

New Bromeliad Taxon List : https://bromeliad.nl/taxonlist/
Refer to this site for latest species name changes and correct spelling.

Bromeliads in Australia (BinA) http://bromeliad.org.au/
Refer to this site for its Photo Index, Club Newsletters many with Table of Contents Index and there's Detective Derek Articles.

Keep these web sites set as desktop icons for quick reference access.

Where do I Find the Dates ?

www.bromeliad.org.au then click "Diary".
Check this site for regular updates of times, dates and addresses of meetings and shows in your area and around the country.