

Cryptanthus.

'The forgotten bromeliad'

❖ **Origins**

The name cryptanthus is derived from the Greek words 'cryptos' meaning 'hidden' and 'Anthos' meaning 'flower'.

Cryptanthus grow on the floor of Brazil's forests in low light, high humidity and rainfall in a well-rotted leaf litter that is also rich in bird and animal manures.

❖ **Morphology**

Like most bromeliads cryptanthus absorb nutrients and moisture through both their trichome covered leaves and their abundant root system. Male flowers are in the plants central cup with female flowers being located in the leaf axels.

❖ **Growing conditions**

- ❖ Dappled light, warmth and mid to high humidity. Damp but not wet. I go through and pick up the odd pot to check if they are heavy (well watered) or light (dry) before watering again.

❖ **Preferred Location.**

Floor of the shade house... I have noticed that others grown on benches in the shade house do not grow as well. I think it is due to less humidity

Shady gardens or indoors. essentially wherever you can grow ferns, anthuriums or begonias

- ❖ **Potting mediums** should be moisture retaining but free draining with a PH of 5.0 to 6.0. To achieve this, you can mix river sand,

peat moss, perlite, vermiculite and potting mix in relatively equal parts OR use a commercial African violet or azalea mix. Peat moss is an acidic medium which cryptanthus prefer.

- ❖ **Pot Size.** Cryptanthus have a shallow root system and will if grown in the ground spread their roots and the plants circumference will match. So, you will need a shallow pot a similar size to your plant. You can use squat pots, a deep saucer with drainage holes drilled in the bottom or a bonsai pot.

❖ **Fertiliser**

When I first pot up our cryptanthus I give them a small amount of super phosphate, slow-release fertiliser and a bit of organic xtra. Through the growing season they get fed a weekly foliar spray.

The reason I feed more heavily than other growers is because I don't use a commercial potting mix but use my own blend which is fertiliser free.

When you think of where they grow naturally, they derive nutrient from a humus rich forest floor, frequent rainfall and bird/animal dropping. My cryptanthus have never lost variegation or appeared stretched I believe they love food. As with all other bromeliads fertilising depends on among other things light levels. The more light they are in the more readily they use nutrient.

❖ **Removing Offsets and Potting**

Remove offsets when they are 1/3 to 1/2 of the parent plant in size. If you have to yank it's not ready.

Don't be concerned if there are few to no roots on your pup. They will grow.

Keep your pup well secured in its new pot by using satay sticks, plant hangers or scoria/gravel.

I sometimes find it easier add the fertiliser and imidacloprid in first and then place the cryptanthus in the mix and anchor it.

❖ **Creative uses.**

Cryptanthus are well suited to terrariums and other terrestrial craft such as kokedama and planting in the nooks and cracks of a log.

❖ **What they don't like**

Being wet and cold

Watch out for snails

❖ **Growing Cryptanthus at Home**

Many plant lovers are beginning their cryptanthus growing adventures at home. It is common to see them growing plants on windowsills, making use of grow lights, as well as setting up small spaces in cabinets and on patios.

❖ Cryptanthus in particular, are well-suited to well-lit indoor areas. They adapt beautifully to these conditions, thriving when placed under the protective canopy of larger plants—whether on a patio or a veranda. Their ability to flourish in such spaces makes them an ideal choice for indoor gardening.

❖ As I grow older, I have come to appreciate cryptanthus even more. Their compact size is a perfect fit for my needs, and I find them less prickly to handle compared to other varieties.

Also cryptanthus popularity has grown in both the USA & Asia.