

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

Edition: September 2026

Agenda: General Discussion

Venue: PineGrove Bromeliad Nursery
114 Pine Street Wardell 2477
Phone (02) 6683 4188

Study Group meets the 3rd Thursday of each month

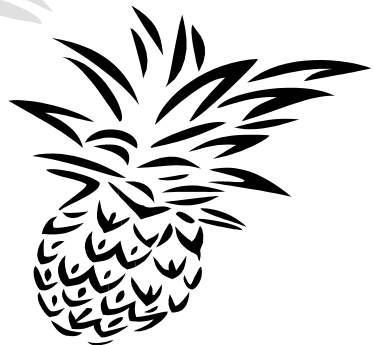
Next meeting October 15th 2026 at 11 a.m.

Editorial Team:

Ross Little

pinegrovebromeliads@bigpond.com

Life Members: Gary McAteer, Coral McAteer
Debbie Smith, Shirley Smith
Ross Little, Keryn Simpson



Statements and opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the Group.
Articles appearing in FNCBSG NewsLetters may be used in other Publications on request and provided that the source is credited.
Use of articles on social media platforms only with written consent for past present or future articles.

Meeting August 20th 2026

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

General Business

Thank you everybody for all the birthday wishes and the cake, it was greatly appreciated, however I may have to go on a little diet now because that cake was so moreish.

Shane delivered an update on the Groups financial state, our account is healthy, we're covering our running costs. Donations throughout the year of consumables from members are greatly appreciated helping us keep in front of running costs.

Back copies of our Newsletter - some members have requested Newsletters they have missed while away on holidays as many do prefer the hard copy. We often have one or two extras to cover our holiday makers, if not on hand they can easily be ordered from our printer (at a cost) and available for collection at the following meeting.

If e-mail is preferred simply notify the editorial team (me) of the year and month required and they can be forwarded to you. Our Newsletters are accessible on the Bromeliads in Australia web site in Club News - <http://bromeliad.org.au/>
Thank you Ian Hook.

Show, Tell and Ask!

Debbie has noticed brown/spots marks on her variegated Guzmanias, is this due to the recent cold weather we have been experiencing ?? We are fortunate here in our northern rivers area of NSW that we are able to grow many plants in our open gardens year round. However we have to understand the preferential growing conditions of our plants, Guzmanias are an understory plant, therefore they do best when grown in shady areas under trees or up in them. Sometimes it helps to move a plant to another location in the hope of finding its preferred microclimate in your garden, that warmer spot where the cold air has been drawn away from. Maintaining humidity for them is important, dry brown tips and leaf margins could also be an indicator of low humidity.

Since many Guzmanias are epiphytes it may be beneficial to raise them up off the ground away from cold air during our cooler months.

Keep plants well fertilized, even in winter many are flowering, that's an indicator they are in growth and still need feeding, a well fed plant is a strong healthy one.

With the weather beginning to warm up now I feel it is time to remind growers contemplating creating a full sun garden area it's time to start acclimatizing your plants now if you haven't already done so. Many of our Bromeliads show off their best characters when grown in full all day sun, however this should be done gradually, don't shift your bromeliads from shade directly into the summer sun. Reduce shade gradually or do it in winter. However burnt leaves will grow out.

What Bromeliads can we grow in full, all day sun? Or is it easier to remember which Bromeliads NOT to put in "full sun" e.g. species and hybrids of Guzmania, Nidularium, Canistropsis and some Vriesea and all those plants that love deep shade and a fair degree of moisture. There is a certain amount of trial and error involved, just don't put your favourite or most expensive plants out into full sun without a trial first, be brave but cautious.

Most Bromeliads are epiphytic and require good drainage, the red clay soil of our area is a bit heavy and not exactly free draining. Maybe consider building up the selected growing area with rocks and logs and back filling with mulch, pine bark or a good free draining potting mix and place your plants into it. Eventually they will grow over the rocks and logs onto the red soil on their own, it's better to try and get them off to a good start rather than a slow struggling one.

It is also time to remind everybody regards using potting mixes:

Read the Safety Instructions - avoid contact with eyes or skin. Avoid breathing liquid mists or dust. Wear suitable protective clothing and gloves (ASA) and a particulate mask. Wash hands thoroughly immediately after use. Wash work clothes regularly. Clean up by wet sweeping or vacuuming. Store in a cool place.

Mixes used depend on where one lives, climatic and geological parameters, as well as personal preferences. Having examined potting mixes used by different growers over the years and noting the high quality of their growth attained, one realizes that the potting mix is not all that important. Primarily because most Bromeliads are epiphytes, so the most important characteristic of a potting mix for Bromeliads should be the drainage factor. Just about any type of medium can be used for a Bromeliad potting mix e.g. specialized mixes, crushed granite, perlite, blue metal, a variety of barks, scoria, ash, basalt, sandstone, limestone, clay, styrofoam chunks, etc. any combination of these will suffice. As long as your desired mix holds the plant upright and you are happy with the quality of growth, the specific ingredients are probably not that important. Given that slow release fertilizers depend on water to break down and become useable, plants grown in free draining potting mixes require more frequent fertilizing, added zeolite helps.

As an exercise try growing two of the same plant, pot one in your preferred mix and the other in a totally different mix, report the results in one year's time.

Open Popular Vote

1st	Ross Little	<i>Guzmania</i> 'Kapoho Fire'
2nd	Shane Fitzgerald	<i>Neoregelia</i> 'Big O'
2nd	Keryn Simpson	<i>Neoregelia</i> 'Johannis Midnight' unreg.

Tillandsia

1st	Gary McAteer	<i>Tillandsia ionantha</i> var. <i>vanhyningii</i>
2nd	Ross Little	<i>Tillandsia ionantha</i>
2nd	Deb Baker	<i>Tillandsia jonesii</i>
2nd	Shane Fitzgerald	<i>Tillandsia</i> 'Pink Sugar'

Judges Choice

1st	Ross Little	<i>Guzmania</i> 'Kapoho Fire'
-----	-------------	-------------------------------

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.



on your
60th Wedding Anniversary
from all of us at FNCBSG NSW

Driftwood - Is it Safe to Mount Bromeliads On ?

Yes - it is safe if treated to leach the salts out prior to use.

Driftwood collected from the beach will have absorbed salts from the sea water.

These salts need to be leached out of the driftwood for it to be safe to mount Bromeliads such as Aechmea, Billbergia, Neoregelia, Vriesea, Tillandsias and many more onto it. There are exceptions though, Tillandsias that grow in the mangroves or other Bromeliads that grow very near the ocean. I'd preferably still err on the safe side and leach the salts out.

How to Leach the Salts Out

Submerge the driftwood entirely in a tub of water to soak the salt out, for slightly larger pieces a bath tub works well. The water should be changed regularly, at least every two days for a couple of weeks. Once you feel it is salt free dry the driftwood out in the sun for a few days before considering mounting your plant/s especially if using glue to secure the plants.

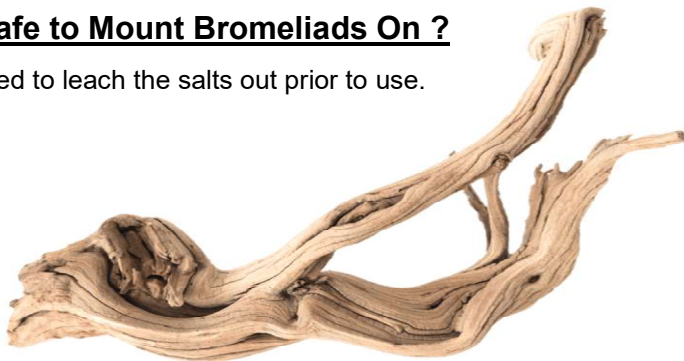
If soaking your driftwood to leach out the salts isn't an option and time permits just leave your pieces out in the open allowing rain to rinse the salts out over a longer period of time, say six to 12 months pending rainfall.

Rocks such as sandstone and pumice stone should be treated as per either method discussed above.

Driftwood can be aesthetically pleasing as a table mount. Selecting the right size piece for balance is important to support the size of your plant/s.

A large mount could support a number of mini Neoregelias or small Tillandsias or just one or two larger plants, balance is the key for an eye catching piece.

A rough surface and indentations provide good places for plant roots to attach. Glue the plants in place and add a bit of moss over the glue to help disguise it.



Tillandsia vanhyningii
1st Tillandsia Gary McAteer



Tillandsia ionantha
shown by Ross Little

Tillandsia 'Pink Sugar'
grown by Shane Fitzgerald



Tillandsia jonesii grown by Deb Baker





Guzmania 'Kapoho Fire' 1st Open and Judges Choice Ross Little



Neoregelia 'Kayelene'
unreg.
grown by
Kayelene Guthrie



Aechmea 'Kiwi' gown by Shane Fitzgerald



Neoregelia 'Johannis Midnight'
unreg.
grown by Keryn Simpson



Neoregelia 'Big O'
grown by Shane Fitzgerald

Aechmea 'Dark Storm'
grown by
Grown by Deb Baker



Neoregelia 'Mai Scarlet Fever'
grown by Deb Baker

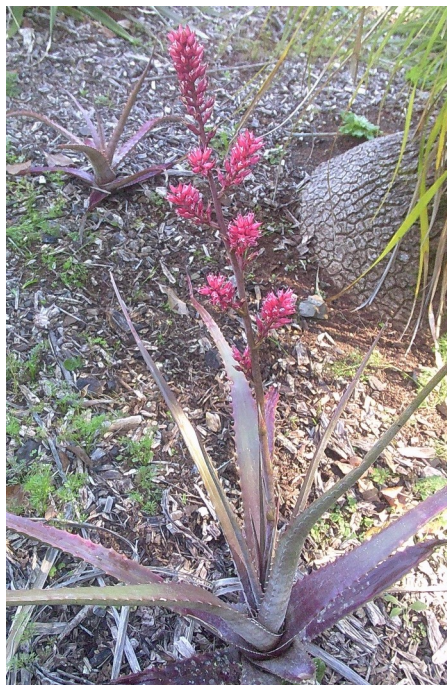


Hechtia rosea E. Morren ex Baker, 1889.

The genus *Hechtia* was first described by Friedrich Klotzsch in 1835 and named in honour of Julius Gottfried Conrad Hecht (1771–1837), German counsellor to the King of Prussia. It is the sole genus of the subfamily Hechtioideae which contains 104 species. (Bromeliad Taxon List 2026)

Hechtia rosea can be found growing as terrestrials, they grow in rocky soils and in crevices between rocks often in dry scrubby areas in southern Mexico.

Hechtia except for *Hechtia gayorum* are dioecious, a condition in which separate male (staminate) and female (pistillate) plants are produced. Aside from *Hechtia*, in Central America only, *Androlepis*, *Aechmea mariae-reginae*, and certain species of *Catopsis* are dioecious.



Hechtia rosea has been reluctant to flower for us here in our garden for a few years until now and has pistillate flowers, it's a girl. Each flower has a stigma only, the part that receives pollen, no anthers - no pollen bearing male parts.

Most Bromeliads have perfect flowers in which both male (stamens) and female (pistil) parts are present and functional.

The male and female plants of *Hechtia* are sexually dimorphic for inflorescence and floral characters meaning males differ in appearance from females.

Unisexual dimorphism enforces obligate out crossing, promoting genetic diversity within populations.



Most *Hechtias* grow best in full, all day sun, however some are just as happy in partial sun also, as can be seen in these photos of *Hechtia rosea* taken in their natural habitat of dry, scrubby brush at Nizanda, Oaxaca, Mexico.

In this location we encountered two groupings of *Hechtia rosea* growing in the same habitat not far apart from each other having different foliage colours, one with green leaves the other having reddish brown leaves.

Hechtia prefer a well-draining and gritty soil to help prevent root rot, such as a cactus or succulent mix with perlite, coarse sand or gravel added to reflect their preference for low-fertility, rocky substrates. They don't need a lot of fertilizer, but they will greatly benefit from it and grow faster and larger if they are fertilized in their growing period.



Water them sparingly during their active growth period of spring and summer, allowing the medium to dry completely between waterings.

Reduced watering to minimal over the winter months when plants are dormant to simulate their seasonal dryness.

Over watering is a risk that can lead to root rot and total demise of the plant. A well established plant that has a good root system can be quite drought-tolerant and handle extended dry periods.

Photos by Ross Little and Lesley Baylis

After discussing mounting Tillandsias and other Bromeliads on driftwood, rocks or pumice stone the conversation flowed on to fertilising them.

The short answer is - absolutely, especially if you want strong healthy plants and offsets.

The response to that discussion was that over time our Bromeliads do respond well to additional feeding. In their natural habitat Bromeliads are fertilised from leaf litter, frog and various other animal and bird droppings e.g. humming birds. Their root development has changed from primarily holdfast to the adaptation that some of the plants nutrition is absorbed through their root system. For potted plants a measured amount of slow release fertiliser should be placed on or added in the potting medium, however mounted plants require foliar feeding with half strength soluble fertiliser.

The general rule of thumb is to fertilise weekly but weakly, hence half strength.

If mounting Billbergias or Neoregelias be mindful not to over fertilise them to help maintain good colour and conformation - stouter plants. Too much fertiliser may cause colour loss and elongated leaves until the fertiliser is used up, after this the colour may return and the next sets of leaves may grow stouter again.

Bromeliads will only take up as much fertiliser as they need, so you can't over fertilise them – unless the concentration level is too high or you fertilise them too frequently or you haven't got your growing conditions quite right e.g. light, water and air. Hence Chris Larson's following article '**A Matter of Energy**'.

Bromeliads should be fertilised regularly and because different genera flower and pup at different times of the year, fertilising becomes an all year round task. Given the amount of rainfall we've had recently, it is likely that your fertiliser application should be increased to help offset any leaching.

What to Use - some popular suggestions from members of our Group were:

Yates Thrive Flower and Fruit (the purple box).

Manutec's Pink and Blue fertilisers used alternatively.

Nutri-Tech Black Gold fertiliser.

Peters Profesional Allrounder and **Peters** Excel Calmag Finisher used alternatively.

Campbells Diamond Blue range.

Power Feed.

The preferred fertilisers for most Bromeliads are higher in Potassium (K) with a lower level of Nitrogen (N). For Vriesea, Guzmania, Alcantarea, Cryptanthus, Dyckia etc. a fertilizer with a more balanced NPK is suitable.



A Matter of Energy — Part 1

by Chris Larson

This presentation began its' formulation as a look at what I view as popular misconceptions I have heard over the years, and was designed for beginners – which can probably be better qualified as my alternate view of the theories I have heard. To my surprise, the more experienced growers in the audience to which I gave this presentation were full of questions about these matters, which resulted in this presentation. The more I look at this, the more I realize that the concepts we all think are principles are really a set of variable guidelines, which are best kept as a guide in the art of growing our plants to their fullest potential, but few of them are good enough to hang your hat on.

Also at the time, I was reading John Catlan's book Under The Mango Tree, which challenged the old theory of "the first pup being the strongest", amongst other things. I totally agree with him - this ain't necessarily so, or rather needn't be so if you think of the factors which might influence this situation. In perusing this book, one of the things I really liked was that John was investigating certain things that he was seeing, and was always prepared to question the knowledge that he has read, or something that he has surmised from previous experience. His writings seem to be a set of ideas gathered from his experiences, which may or may not be applied to any situation he encounters. So I thought I'd look at the concepts around the matters which influence flowering and pupping, looking at the way we view these processes. Like most growing principles these views have come about through my experiences under the growing conditions I have experienced, what I have read, and discussions I have had with other growers. One thing I have learnt is to always question what you hear or read – and never assume anyone is an expert – but to always listen, watch, and research. As with others, my growing conditions are unique to me – it is conditional on my local climate and how I set up my collection, so therefore will not be identical to any other grower. Even growers in your region, though they will mostly have very similar conditions, will never have the same conditions.

A prime example of a popular viewpoint that I disagree with is the often repeated statement that most bromeliads die after they flower? This statement does more to discourage interested novices than any other I know. Do orchid collectors say that about cymbidiums, where, after flowering, the back bulbs wither away while the new shoot takes over? Not only does it turn off novices, but it is not a useful view when thinking about growing bromeliads. I have many clumps of plants which I began growing 30 years ago, and they are still alive – and people still say they die after they flower. This viewpoint is also very unhelpful with decisions on if and when to take pups, but more about that later.

There are a few other things that I would like to discuss first.

This first of the “growing concepts” I would like to discuss is that of apical dominance, the mechanism that suppresses axillary buds, giving most of the plants resources to the apex (the highest point). I haven’t read much on this subject other than the first Benzing book, but in the 80s not much was known about how this mechanism worked. The principle behind this is that basically a plant gives most of its’ energy to the part of the plant that is highest. (Ref 1). To me the scientific reasons for this aren’t so important – the main thing is how these principles are basically employed by the plants we choose to grow, which is that many plants send most of their energy into growing at the apex, until the cells at the apex turn into the cells that make up a flower. When the apical point turns to flower growth, the old growing pattern can’t continue. As a result the auxins that suppress the growth of offsets are no longer manufactured allowing pups to form. A similar action occurs when all of the pups are removed from a plant that has flowered. The plant is forced to take a different action. But to me, a brief understanding of these principles is very helpful when cultivating bromeliads.

Back to Mr Benzing. He states that there are the following forms of offsets:

Precocious basal — more often called grass or adventitious offsets. These have a habit of being produced by a plant for the early period of a plants growth then stop a long time before the plant reaches flowering size. Sometimes they die when the flowering plant dies. If you require a backup plant, remove these when they show signs of producing wider leaves, though they may be taken while still having only juvenile leaves, but more care has to be taken while they are at that size. They are quite different to those produced under other pupping systems.

Basal offsets — we should all know these as they are the most common form of pupping. They either come straight from the base or are produced on stolons/runners.

Offsets higher up the plant — which are most likely to have been seen in *Vriesea splendens* and its’ hybrids. These are often tricky to take off, and many people do not attempt it.

Viviparous offsets — plants produced from the flower spike after flowering.

Particular plants seem to be inclined to use only one or two of these methods, but many times I have seen particular plants use an uncharacteristic method (for that particular species) when subjected to unusual conditions.

While many plants generally only pup after flowering, some plants freely pup without flowering. This is a case of the plant not producing the auxin which suppresses the pups. Some plants are more prone to switching off production of the auxin, or they possibly don’t produce as much before flowering than those that generally don’t pup. External factors can also affect the plant in producing

pups when the terminal meristem (the growing point) is damaged due to factors such as heat or physical damage, or the plant simply allows pups even when the terminal meristem is not destroyed. Some adventurous growers will even purposefully destroy the terminal meristem (e.g. with a screwdriver) to force the plant to produce pups, though this may have unfortunate side effects – it is recommended that you seek advice from someone experienced with this, prior to performing such actions.

Another commonly misunderstood concept with growing bromeliads is the conversation about feeding bromeliads. Working as a retail nurseryman, I have long conversations with customers unable to get around the concept of using fertilisers. However with 30 years of growing bromeliads and seeing others in the bromeliad world’s collections, and spending the last 10 years working with the commercial production of bromeliads (longer specifically with tillandsias), I have come to the conclusion that many amateurs underestimate the importance of food. When I think of plant food the primary thing that I have control over is the amount of light that the plant receives. I would like, foremost, to control both light and carbon dioxide, but without a technical setup that is difficult to provide in my circumstances I cannot control the CO₂. But the idea that light is probably the most important plant food, is something we should all look at more seriously. In this respect, optimally, we should grow our plants in the lightest position which doesn’t stress or burn the leaves. This doesn’t mean up against a house facing west where it is in heavy shade for the first 4 hours of the day, medium shade for another two, then very strong light for the last half. A commercial nursery judges good light, as bright light for as close as possible to all day. This is often very hard to achieve within the confines of a suburban block. It is important form at stressful times, to position your plants with regard to those you want to prioritize access to light. There may be those that will lose colour or grow in poor shape that you want in prime light positions, but some plants will grow very slowly unless given access to good light.

Once you have addressed the light issue, then it is time to assess the issue of how to feed and how much food to apply. Food should always be applied in relation to available light and the nature of the plant. Too much food for the available light will result in longer leaves, sometimes poor colour, and a poorly shaped plant. One lady I spoke to recently said that she fed her *Aechmea blanchetiana*, after which it lost its’ colour – so she stopped feeding all of her bromeliads. After this she had a couple of plants which flowered well, then died. When I explained that this can happen to plants when they use a large amount of their available energy/resources in producing flowers and seeds, leaving too little to produce pups, she was surprised. There is a happy balance of feeding plants with a balanced fertiliser, where the rate of fertilisation does not detract from the shape and colour of the plant. The lady then suggested using Seasol, to which I pointed out that Seasol is not a balanced fertiliser, and that when she

chose a fertilizer she should look to someone in her area that knows about these things – either a professional nurseryman or an experienced grower should be able to advise what she should use. Both commercially available liquid and controlled release fertilisers can be used on bromeliads with good results. Even coloured foliage plants such as Neoregelias, will grow faster and with more vigour if fed at least a little in their early stages, and if it is done properly they will be magnificent plants. Care should be taken to ensure that Neoregelias have little food left when coming into flower to attain maximum colour. Vrieseas and Aechmeas will have superior flower spikes if well fed – so most growers of show bench plants have fed them well. To produce good plants which look like the ones on the show bench, or in the books, it is necessary to observe and take care of your plants. Most importantly make sure the plant is fed when it's expending energy on flowers, and if you want them to pup well, fertilise them after flowering.

This brings me back to another of the comments I have long heard about bromeliads that like to form a clump first before flowering. In my experience in commercial growing I have come to an observation that this may not be a valid observation in many cases, as many of these same plants flower naturally as single plants when given very good conditions. I have already explained the nature of what I understand of apical dominance and its' effect on pups, but there is another factor to be considered. The plant uses its' foliage to convert various elements into usable food. There are many books detailing that a plant will not send up a flower spike until it has the energy to complete the cycle. Of course the larger amount of foliage can produce more effectively the nutrients for the plant to flower. But if a plant is fed well and given the optimum amount of light, it may not need the aid of the clump to provide energy for the spike.

Those orchid growers amongst us have long ago worked out that there are different fertilisers to be used in growing leaves and providing the nutrients necessary to flower – and that it is necessary to have a good plant to act as a food factory to push up that flower spike. Why many bromeliad growers have been so slow to take this up is a bit of a mystery to me. It is possible to have a nice big plant while maintaining shape which will provide a better show when flowering. Also, another thing that local cymbidium growers use is the addition of dolomite lime, correcting the acidity of the soil while providing calcium and magnesium, which is highly beneficial in extending the life of the mix, while adding vital nutrients. I wonder how many bromeliad growers do this, instead leaving their plants in the same pot for years, with a ph so far out that little of the nutrient added to the pot is available to the plant. (Note that when using substances such as rock type substances and coco peat, there may be less of an issue with ph problems.)

(to be continued - part 2 next month)