

Clone preservation project update - Jul 2009

As the first patented bromeliad, *Aechmea* 'Foster's Favorite' has been well documented in the pages of The Bromeliad Society Bulletin (a formal description and summary of the development of this hybrid first showed up in volume 5 starting on page 29) and its successor Journal of the Bromeliad Society. We know the basic facts: this was a hybrid of *Aechmea victoriana* var. *discolor* and *Aechmea racinae*, the distinguishing characteristics included shiny burgundy-colored leaves and a pendant inflorescence. Still, there are questions remaining about this early hybrid. In particular, the variegated form *Aechmea* 'Foster's Favorite Favorite' was considerably larger than typical *Aechmea* 'Foster's Favorite'. This could arise from a cross between the same parental stocks, or could indicate that Foster used more than one clone of *Aechmea racinae* and/or *Aechmea victoriana* in his crosses. The latter possibility is increased because Foster noted in the formal description (reference above) that he had made several crosses between the same parents with no notable variation (presumably including size) in the resulting seedlings.

Over time, several variations on the original Foster's Favorite have been introduced into the market. *Ae.* 'Red Ribbon' arose as a well-documented sport in the Miami area during the 1950's. *Ae.* 'Black Jack', with a darker foliage, attributed to Foster's breeding program in the Cultivar Registry, was commonly grown in Florida during the later 1970's, but seems to have disappeared from the market. *Aechmea* 'Perez' is the dark-leaved variety currently in the marketplace. This plant was offered by Hummel before 1970, possibly from his own breeding program, but the information in the Cultivar Registry suggests it may be a direct descendent of Foster's original hybrid. Recently, there is an even darker-leaved plant out of Europe. I do not even have a name for this plant. Finally, *Aechmea* 'Candy Stripe' is listed in the Cultivar Registry as arising from the same cross. This plant was registered by Cole. I know nothing about it beyond the entry.

Please look in your own collections. Does anyone have *Ae.* 'Black Jack' that can be traced back to Foster? Does anyone have an alternative explanation for the origin of Black Jack? My own impression in the 1970's was that Black Jack was a recent development, but much of what I thought I knew in the 1970's has turned out to be wrong. How many people still grow Foster's Favorite? Does anyone know anything about *Ae.* 'Candy Stripe'? (Please remember that the name Candy Stripe has been used on several plants characterized by a pattern of narrow red and green lines along the leaves, here we are interested in a plant that looks like Foster's Favorite in overall shape and inflorescence but, presumably, has a pattern of stripes different from that seen on Red Ribbon.) There is also a question whether 'improved' clones of *Aechmea*

'Foster's Favorite' and *Aechmea* 'Foster's Favorite Favorite' have been developed by other growers. Since we define a clone as the vegetative descendants of a single plant (or group of indistinguishable plants), an 'improved' form would constitute a distinct clone.

In my own collection, I have Foster's Favorite, Foster's Favorite Favorite (possibly an 'improved' clone), Perez, Red Ribbon and the very dark European plant of unknown name. The Foster's Favorite Favorite does not like my conditions, and is barely holding on. All other clones seem to be very hardy.

A few more comments on the *Aechmea chantinii* complex covered last month. First, I was mistaken when I said the ground color ranged to deep violet. Upon comparing the actual plant colors with the Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart, I found that the correct description for the darkest ground color would be a dark brown. I also have *Aechmea chantinii* 'Ebony' in bloom now. The inflorescence is small relative to the plant (although this may be partly due to culture), the leaves are narrow compared to other clones and the banding is usually even with bold white bands. The ground color of the leaves is as dark as in any other *Ae. chantinii* clone I have seen. There is some red in the floral bracts, and the petals have distinct white tips.

Nat DeLeon has a plant he believes is descended from the clone grown in Europe before the rediscovery of the species in 1960. This may, in fact, be a descendant of the type clone since it was apparently the only clone grown in Europe. Once the identity of this plant is verified, it will be added to the pool of distribution plants. In the meantime, if anyone else has a plant that they think represents this original European clone, we would appreciate the chance to make direct comparisons.

A question that has come to the fore recently involves the three miniature *Neoregelia* species described by A. Ruschi: *Neo. punctatissima*, *Neo. rubrifolia* and *Neo. tigrina*. The descriptions and illustrations in the Smith and Downs monograph are not sufficient to pin down the identity of the species, and Derek Butcher has lately insisted that the plants we have been calling *Neo. punctatissima* are misidentified. Examination of the type specimens would undoubtedly solve this problem, but examining the holotypes in Brazil involves a lot of travel. In the meantime, a very unusual entry under each of the three species notes isotypes in Bromelario Foster. Foster may have received living plants of each species. If so, the notation that they are isotypes suggests they are the same clone as the holotype (currently, they would be called clonotypes). As such, they would be as useful in fixing our understanding of the names as the holotype. If any of these lines survived, they may still be in cultivation. Please let me know if you think you have any plants from Foster that have these names.