

Clone preservation update - May 2009

Due to the demands of the BSSF Annual show in April, little was accomplished in the clone preservation project during the past month, so this update will be relatively brief.

Enough interest has been expressed in the project to justify moving to some of the operational facets of the project. Two areas, setting up procedures for verifying the identity of 'forgotten' clones and establishing a network of volunteers to maintain the various clones in cultivation, are of primary importance.

We now know of several older collections that need to be studied with care. However, as much as I might want to visit collections throughout the state, it is hard enough for me to visit all of the important collections in the Miami area. Also, my ability to recognize all of the potentially desirable clones is limited. I depend on people with wider experience, such as Nat DeLeon, to provide guidance on the older plants (pre-1970's) and the plethora of hybrids produced since the 1980's. We can also use any available literature (articles in BSI or local newsletters, the Cultivar Registry, FCBS Photo Index, catalogs, etc.)

We need volunteers from throughout the state who can conduct surveys of collections in their own localities. Initial surveys do not need to be exhaustive, but it would be especially useful if the surveyors were prepared to provide labels for plants they recognize. A person familiar with many of the commonly grown bromeliads could perform an invaluable service identifying the plants in a collection that require further study. As a first step in further study, it would probably be useful to try photographing the plants in detail, and distributing the photos to knowledgeable people throughout the state. It may turn out to be feasible to identify many plants through this means alone. Plants that require even further work can be dealt with on a case-by-case basis until we are able to come up with a formal process.

In order to start working on the identification process, I am requesting BSSF members to bring (labeled or unlabeled) clones of *Aechmea chantinii* to the May meeting. There we can discuss some of the characters that can be used to distinguish among various clones.

Finding clones is, of course, just the first step in the process. Clones that are widespread in cultivation will require no immediate action, but need to be monitored. The database developed for this project (in the future) will support the monitoring function. As a first approximation, we can say 'widespread in cultivation' means

found in more than 10 collections spread throughout the state. (Here, we would like to solicit input from all interested parties on the best way to define 'widespread in cultivation'. What characteristics should be included in a formal definition?)

Clones that are rarely found in collections need more active care. We would like to recruit a group of volunteer growers, each willing to undertake the cultivation of some endangered clones. Volunteer growers can expect to get access to plants that are not otherwise available and support in growing those plants. In return, they will be expected to follow our requirements for labeling (to minimize the chance of plants losing labels) and to return some offsets for the use of the preservation project (ie, distribution to other growers). The return of offsets will, of course, depend on the plants involved. Given a plant that would usually produce (say) 4 offsets per year, we might request that 2 offsets be returned to the project each year. Volunteer growers would be able to select classes of plants most suited to their interests and growing conditions.

Growers are not restricted to endangered clones, of course. It would be great if someone would like to collect and grow all of the Nat DeLeon hybrids, for instance. In fact, I would strongly encourage this because Nat DeLeon is available to confirm the identification of his hybrids. The same is true of Gary Hendrix hybrids, Herb Hill hybrids and Bullis hybrids. In all of these instances, several of the hybrids, at least, are widespread, but the clone preservation project could help ferret out and make available hybrids that are not easily found. Collections could also be built around plant groups rather than hybridizers. For instance, the various *Aechmea* subgenus *Ortgiesii* species form a group of reasonable size. You could expand the group by including hybrids involving the species.

The possibilities are endless. Whether you are interested in species, hybrids or both, you can participate in the clone preservation project. If you have ideas for a way to participate that has not been mentioned, bring them up. The project is still in a very early developmental stage, and all contributions are welcome.