

GROWING BROMELIADS

The Bromeliad is a member of a large plant family that is native to the warmer climates of North and South America. Bromeliads grow in trees, attach themselves to rocks and live on the forest floor. They vary in size from one inch to 35 feet high. Bromeliads have many appealing qualities, but their foliage is generally the most attractive part of the plant. Some Bromeliads have several bands or variegations on their leaves, which exhibit different color patterns. Along with their attractive foliage, Bromeliads also develop beautiful flowering stalks that are vivid, unique and bold. Pineapple is an example of a fruiting Bromeliad.

Bromeliads need strong light to grow well and produce flowers. You must have a very well-lit area in your home to grow these plants properly, although you can use artificial light. Most Bromeliads have a natural reservoir that's formed by the leaves, which are arranged in a vase-like shape with overlapping bases. This reservoir holds a large amount of water, so be careful not to over-water your Bromeliad or you may rot the roots.

Most Bromeliads originated in the tropics. They need very warm temperatures to survive and grow well. Keep your room temperature at 70 degrees F during the day and 55 to 60 degrees F at night.

Bromeliads can be fertilized every three or four weeks with a half-strength mixture of all-purpose soluble fertilizer. This weak fertilizer can be placed directly in the receptacle cups of your Bromeliad. Roots do not need to be fertilized as frequently. The soil should supply moisture to your plant without getting too soggy. The soil should also be porous enough to allow water to drain off easily and allow air to reach the roots.

You can force Bromeliads to bloom easily by using a healthy, mature plant with a good root system. First, drain all water from the plant and place the plant inside a clear, airtight plastic bag with a large ripe apple. Ripe apples give off a gas called ethylene, which triggers the formation of flowers on Bromeliads. After two to three days, remove the plant from the bag and replace the water you removed. Depending on the type of plant you have, flowering will begin in six to fourteen weeks.

Bromeliads to consider include the Billbegia, with mottled green leaves and small but colorful flowers. The tube-like Cryptanthus or Earth Star has strikingly variegated foliage. Guzmanias have narrow flat green leaves that turn brilliant red in the center. Vriesias have strap-like leaves and feather-like flowers.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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