



Bromeliad Care

Colorful Bromeliads make excellent houseplants! They require very little care and are hardy. Like an orchid, the bracts of a Bromeliad will keep their bright hues for long periods of time. Many will last 6 or 8 months before turning brown. Unlike an orchid, the original “mother plant” does not re-bloom or send up more spikes of colored bracts. It will produce 2 to 3 “pup plants” at its base that can be removed and transplanted.

Light

Bromeliads will tolerate a wide range of light intensities, including low light. Generally, plants with hard, thick, grey, grey-green and fuzzy leaves will take the highest light levels. These are the Aechmeas, Tillandsias, Ananas (Pineapple) and Billbergia. Those with soft, green, thin leaves such as Guzmania, Neoregelia and Vriesia do best under lower light levels. If the leaves become yellowish or pale green, the light level is too high. If the plant becomes very dark green or the colored bracts darken, the light is too low.

Humidity

A relative humidity of 40% to 60% is best. Unfortunately, the average home is well below 40%, especially in the winter when the heat is on. Humidity around the plants can be improved by placing the Bromeliad pot in a saucer filled with gravel or pebbles. Do not allow the pot to stand in water because this will waterlog the soil, possibly causing root rot. Misting is also helpful.

Air Circulation

Bromeliads are epiphytes, meaning they grow on other plants rather than in soil. Because of this, they need good air circulation to thrive. Fresh air provides them with essential carbon dioxide and moisture. When these plants are kept in stagnant air, they become more susceptible to problems like scale insects and fungal diseases. Fortunately, maintaining good airflow is simple - just opening a window on mild days is usually enough to keep your bromeliad healthy.

Water

Bromeliads are drought-tolerant plants that are more often harmed by overwatering than underwatering. When growing them in pots, water thoroughly until water drains from the bottom, but then wait until the soil surface feels dry before watering again. This could mean watering every 10 days to 3 weeks, depending on conditions. If you notice the leaves starting to curl, this is a sign the plant is too dry.

Many bromeliads have leaves that form a cup-like center (called a “vase”). While you can add water to this vase, it’s not essential to keep it constantly filled. In fact, keeping standing water in the vase, especially in low-light conditions, can lead to bacterial and fungal problems. Instead, fill the vase after you water the soil, then empty out any stagnant water after a couple of weeks. Wait a week before refilling. To keep your bromeliad healthy, it’s helpful to rinse the leaves monthly, either with a hose or in the shower, to remove accumulated dust.

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Fertilizer

Feeding should only be done in the late spring and summer. During the winter or under low light, Bromeliads need no feeding. Use a water-soluble fertilizer at 1/3 the recommended dosage applied to the soil only. We recommend Maxsea 16-16-16 or Schultz Cactus Food once a month (May through August).

The Flower Is Finished

The colorful “bloom” of a bromeliad will eventually fade and die, even with perfect care. You have two options: discard the plant and buy a new one (which many people do), or keep growing it to produce offspring plants called “pups.” If you choose to keep the plant, use sharp clippers to cut the flowering stalk as close to the base as possible - this is necessary for Guzmanias, Vriesias, and Aechmenas. After removing the stalk, move the plant to a brighter location if it was previously in low light.

Transplanting

New plants called ‘pups’ will grow from the side of the mother plant near its base. Wait until the mother plant is nearly dead before removing them. The pups will be 1/3 to 1/2 the size of the mother. Remove with a sharp knife or clippers.

A prepared orchid mix is ideal to pot your pups in or you can make your own mix using 1 part peat, 1 part fine bark and 1 part sand or perlite. Enclose the pot in a plastic bag for the first 3 or 4 weeks to maintain a humid environment. When your new plants have reached an acceptable size, you can treat or “train” them to bloom by putting them in a paper bag with an apple. Apples produce ethylene, which stimulate flowering. Leave your new plants in the “apple bag” for 3 or 4 days. You should see the beginnings of a flower spike in about 6 to 8 weeks after treatment.