

Propagating Your Bromeliad Offsets

Bromeliads are most commonly propagated by offsets or 'pups'. Nearly all cultivated bromeliads produce offsets. If you want to enjoy a larger, full specimen with multiple blooms, you need not remove the offsets. However if you want to propagate the plant, the offsets may be removed and potted to grow and bloom, renewing the cycle.

Bromeliad offsets are ready to pot as soon as they are removed from the 'mother' plant. About one third the size of the original plant is a recommended size for removal.

1. Remove offsets with a firm grip at the base and a slight twist, or cut them free with a pair of sharp shears, close to the main stem of the plant.
2. Offsets need not show any roots before cutting.
3. Most plants will continue to produce more offsets if the first ones are removed.

As long as the offsets are large enough, whether they have roots yet or not is of little concern. Some prefer to let the plants sit a few days to 'callus' at the cut end, but this is not really necessary. Others use and recommend a rooting hormone for not yet rooted offsets. This is not entirely necessary, but is not harmful and the possible benefits are worth the investment.

Consider a pot size, large enough to hold the plant erect, but not too big. Bromeliads like cramped roots. It is better to eventually repot in a larger size later than to over-pot from the start. Pot offsets with the plant centered in the pot, in an upright position. Bromeliads need good aeration at the roots. **DO NOT PACK SOIL TIGHTLY!**

Potting media are many and varied and tailoring your mix to fit the plant and your individual watering habits, etc, is essential to good bromeliad culture. True terrestrials like *Ananas*, *Hechtia*, *Dyckia*, *Pitcairnia* and *Cryptanthus* are generally happy in a heavier mix, more like regular houseplant potting soil. Epiphytic plants like a non-compacting well drained mix. Good drainage is essential and the mix should allow water to pass through to flush accumulated salts and not remain soggy. Canadian peat mixed with bark and Perlite (sponge rock), Aerolite (styrofoam bead) or Aliflor (ceramic clay product) in varying portions makes a good basic mix.

Keep newly potted bromeliads in a shaded location until well rooted. Water only as needed when soil becomes dry to the touch (unrooted plants can't take up water from nonexistent roots). Avoid top dressing with fertilizer, again, until the offsets are rooted well. It is perfectly okay to use a foliar feed on unrooted offsets.

Minimal care and attention to detail at the start will reward you with healthier plants and better blooms later on.

Tropiflora, LLC

3530 Tallevast Road, Sarasota, Florida 34243

Phone: (941) 351-2267 Fax: (941) 351-6985 Email: sales@tropiflora.com

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