

# *Tropiflora care for*

## BROMELIADS IN THE TERRARIUM AND VIVARIUM

Bromeliads' exotic shapes and vivid colors evoke the vibrancy of the tropics, adding dramatic impact to the terrarium or vivarium while providing shelter for small animal specimens. Bromeliads as epiphytes add a third dimension, an upper story, to a normally earthbound setting. Choosing bromeliads for use in terrariums is largely a matter of taste, but some knowledge of their requirements will insure success. Light and moisture are foremost among other factors to be considered when choosing your plants.

### General Considerations

**Light** levels are often much less intense within the terrarium than in the ambient environment. Bromeliads requiring less light are often the best choice for terrarium use. As a rule of thumb, those plants with smooth margined (spineless) leaves are suitable for lower light (most *Guzmanias* and *Vrieseas*) and discolor-leaved plants, those green on top and purple below (*Aechmea fulgens discolor*, *Nidularium innocentii*, etc.) are also well suited to lower light. Vividly colored plants with spiny margined leaves usually require brighter light (most *Neoregelias*) as do the silvery *Tillandsias*. Colorful *Cryptanthus* are terrestrial bromeliads which are particularly well suited to the terrarium.

For best results, locate your terrarium in bright, indirect light. Lighting fixtures are available for terrariums that can enable the use of even sun loving species.

**Moisture**, next to light, is the most important factor in the terrarium environment. True terrariums are sealed to prevent moisture from escaping, and are often so humid that water beads on the interior glass walls. Ferns and mosses may thrive in this environment, but few bromeliads can tolerate this excessive moisture. Open terrariums or vivariums may have no top or a well vented one, increasing air movement and lowering humidity, thus enabling the maintenance of a much broader selection of plant material.

Terrariums often contain open water or moist earth, but evaporation alone is insufficient to maintain your bromeliads. Supplemental watering by spraying or sprinkling will be necessary to keep moisture levels up. The cups of 'tank-type' bromeliads should be flushed out and refilled when watering.

### Other Considerations

Bromeliads do not like wet feet! If well drained or not constantly wet, bromeliads may be planted directly in the terrarium soil. If the substrate is too wet, bromeliads may be kept in their own containers, which need not be large and can easily be disguised with stones, wood or other smaller plants. In addition, many bromeliads thrive when grown epiphytically on small limbs, adding a completely different dimension to the mini landscape.

Size is a consideration, and there are many smaller species to choose from, but even large growing ones work well when young. Keep in mind that when bromeliads bloom, some produce flower spikes that may be taller than the space available. Blooming plants may have to be removed or trimmed.

The water-holding leaf axils of many bromeliads are perfect habitat for tree frogs and other amphibians. Some terrarium enthusiasts maintain that spiny bromeliads should be avoided in vivariums to spare injury to precious animal specimens, but many also believe that this is unnecessary.

### Maintenance And Trouble Shooting

Bromeliads are relatively trouble free in terrariums. Problems which may occur are almost always related to overly wet conditions or poor air circulation. Any specimens showing signs of fungus problems should be removed at once from the terrarium for treatment with a fungicide, not containing copper, and allowed to dry out. Few insect pests attack bromeliads, but should an infestation such as scale occur, remove the plants for treatment with soapy water or a systemic insecticide.

Bromeliads in general require minimal fertilization, and an occasional spray of liquid fertilizer, any balanced ratio, about half strength, will suffice. Terrariums do not have drain holes, thus preventing the leaching which would normally occur when watering potted plants. Fertilizers and other chemicals introduced into the terrarium environment tend to remain and accumulate.

### A Few Bromeliads Suitable For Terrariums And Vivariums

*Aechmea fulgens*  
*Aechmea 'Fosters Favorite'*  
*Aechmea 'Maginali'*  
*Canistropsis billbergioides*  
*Catopsis morreniana*  
*Cryptanthus in general (all terrestrials)*  
*Cryptanthus 'Arlety'*  
*Cryptanthus fosterianus*  
*Cryptanthus 'Pink Starlight'*  
*Cryptanthus 'Ruby'*  
*Guzmania 'Empire'*  
*Guzmania lellingeri*  
*Guzmania sanguinea*  
*Neoregelia compacta*  
*Neoregelia 'Fireball'*  
*Neoregelia 'Nonis'*  
*Neoregelia 'Ultima'*  
*Nidularium innocentii*  
*Nidularium rutilans*  
*Orthophytum gurkenii (terrestrial)*  
*Tillandsia cyanea*  
*Tillandsia leiboldiana*  
*Tillandsia flabellata*  
*Tillandsia variabilis*  
*Vriesea fenestralis*  
*Vriesea fosteriana 'Red Chestnut'*  
*Vriesea 'Flammea'*  
*Vriesea 'Pinkert'*  
*Vriesea racinae*  
*Vriesea splendens*

**A little planning and TLC will make your terrarium a delight, and adding bromeliads will make it a showpiece.**

Visit these informative websites for comprehensive information on bromeliads and their culture:

Bromeliad Society International ([bsi.org](http://bsi.org)) and Florida Council Of Bromeliad Societies ([fcb.org](http://fcb.org))

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