MEETING REMINDER •

MONDAY, APRIL 22, 2019 AT 7:00 PM

IN THE GARDEN HOUSE AT

FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

Member Mike Twyford will present a program on selecting and grooming plants for entry into the upcoming June 1-2 TFEPS show. He will discuss exhibiting unique entries, terrariums, or small yet eye-catching exhibits. He will also give pointers on overall grooming to present the best possible specimen.

Mike hopes this will encourage members who have never entered or need a nudge to show everyone the really unusual, rare or just plain pretty entry that we have never seen before.

SEE YOU MONDAY!
The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society

Annual Show & Sale

June 1 & 2, 2019 9:30 am – 4:30 pm

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden

Garden House

10901 Old Cutler Road  Coral Gables, FL  33157

The show features an exciting array of rare & unusual plants in a beautifully designed display.

The vendor sales area includes ferns, aroids, orchids, hoyas, crotons, bromeliads, heliconias, flowering trees and more.

Hope to see you there.
You should know that Chad is no longer the Horticultural Biologist at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. But no need to gnash teeth; he is now the Garden’s Chief Explorer! And, fittingly, that is the first title David Fairchild had with the USDA.

Perhaps in anticipation of that new appellation, Chad in December traveled to Thailand, which he considers probably the most exciting place in the world for tropical plant introduction. [Not coincidentally, “Thailand” is the answer to the perennially vexing question, “Where on earth is it consistently hotter and more humid than southern Florida?”] In an acquisition frenzy that ranged from latitude 18°N to 10-11°N, all within the tropics, Chad and Brett Jestrow obtained enough plants to have seen 16 boxes delivered to the Garden by the time of the program.

The group’s first stop was Bangkok, specifically the property of Sappasiri Chaovanich, “Mr. Home,” who has been a visitor to Florida for about 25 years. His plants are grown with the advantage of a reverse osmosis (R.O.) watering system, and new arrivals are confined in bags in order to increase humidity. Mr. Home is an example of what is widely encountered in Thailand: individuals who recognize the importance of exchange and trade in the plant world. For instance, a Pandanus species that failed in Los Angeles thrived in Thailand and is now in Miami. A Sommieria palm that has a dark reputation in Thailand is now doing well in the Fairchild conservatory. And some New World species have shown up in Thailand.

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The main reason for Chad’s December trip was the annual Rama IX Festival. Named for the late Thai king, a great plant lover, the Bangkok-based festival lasts about 10 days. New species appear there every year, and some don’t show up two years in a row. Redder Aglaeonemas can be counted on to be introduced at the festival every year; Euphorbias arrive from Madagascar; Aspleniums, some resembling Nephrolepis, dazzle. There are lots of banana cultivars—some featuring black leafbases—and they can be tasted. Then there are magnificent Adeniums, braided and otherwise; Sansevierias which may be pumped with gibberellins; caladiums; Dracaenas with great curls; and Cordylines. And the shopping continues at night! Thai crotons are amazing, but many are hard to sustain in southern Florida, and the rumor is that they are grown in 100% humidity.

Two plant families native to the Americas—cacti and bromeliads—are popular in Thailand despite its high seasonal rainfall. They thrive because the Thais are skilled at figuring out solutions to cultivation problems. Western horticulturists always learn new techniques on trips to Thailand. For example, Thai growers make frequent cuts to flower stalks of the Cannonball Tree, Couroupita guianensis. This technique causes the tree to flower prolifically.

The shopping around Bangkok doesn’t end at the Rama IX Festival. There’s a plant market every Wednesday. And, of course, Chad’s December expedition continued beyond the festival. Tassanee-Surath Vanno’s nursery near Mr. Home was next on the itinerary. Fairchild is increasingly interested in aquatic plants, and Vanno’s nursery, open to the public, is an excellent source.

After leaving the Bangkok vicinity, the Fairchild delegation went on to the 600-acre Nong Nooch Tropical Botanical Garden. The current owner, Kampon Tansacha, has an extensive history with Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.
Years ago Fairchild’s longtime senior horticulturist, Mary Collins, caught him collecting seed there without permission, but once he clarified his mission, a warm relationship developed, and Fairchild became a generous supplier of palm seed to the new Asian garden. Tansacha now refers to Fairchild as Nong Nooch’s ‘Mother Garden.’

Nong Nooch is a diverse place. Several of its themed gardens mimic those at Versailles. All pottery is made in-house. The outstanding palm collection there includes the Double Coconut, *Lodoicea maldivica*, a distinction even more notable since its native land, the Republic of Seychelles, has stopped shipping viable seed out of the country. Among other special palms at Nong Nooch are Licualas, hybrid clumping coconuts, and dwarf *Dypsis lutescens*. The facility’s cactus gardens are huge.

In recent years, Tansacha has installed colorful dinosaur sculptures around the vast Nong Nooch property. Not only have the reptiles drawn tourists, but, increasingly, those tourists have been Thais. Tansacha is not only quite innovative, but very hands-on. He is always pruning something, even while engaged in a phone conversation.

After departing Nong Nooch, Chad’s party traveled three hours east to visit a man known only as Mr. Poonsak, a grower of Licuala palms and other southeast Asian rainforest plants, including gingers, Costus, Piper, and Ardisia (quite unlike the invasive species known here). The expedition then ventured south 10 hours, encountering interesting Pandanus species growing in limestone karst formations. They also saw Maxburretia, a rare palm, in a limited range. The area is also home to the northernmost species of Rafflesia, a parasite whose host is tropical grapevine. The plant’s only visible feature is its flower, which lasts just a few days. Some Rafflesia species produce the largest flowers in the world.
The Queen Sirikit Botanic Garden in Chiang Mai features a lot of plants from limestone hills. Chad’s arrival there coincided with a botanic festival which included food, and the Fairchild delegation discovered that some Nepenthes species not only eat, but can be eaten!

The Fairchild travelers then moved on to Chiang Mai in far northern Thailand, where they were greeted by the shiny, sensitive and—most important—unaggressive Sunbeam Snake (*Xenopeltis unicolor*). This reptile made no attempt to bite. Adidas once modeled a shoe on the rainbow pattern of this snake’s skin.

They also observed Sapria, another parasite on tropical grapevine, though smaller than Rafflesia. The garden had lots of beautiful bamboo and banana forests. *Musa itinerans* was a particularly notable banana species. The garden also showed off some Royal Projects, which demonstrate sustainable agriculture and can be seen all over Thailand.

Of course, acquiring terrific new tropical plants is just the first step in the process undertaken by Chad and his acquisition team. Treatment at the receiving end is also critical. The first batch of plants arrived in Miami about three days after the travelers returned home. Not all the accessions were placed in identical potting mixes, but perlite is the dominant ingredient. Profile, a calcined clay product, is another potting medium sometimes used for its ability to drain quickly. [It is also commonly deployed on baseball in-fields.] Reverse osmosis irrigation is used for some species. Some of the plants need a lot of care, even though they’ve been in transit just a day and a half.

Chad concluded his presentation on a philosophical note with a paraphrase of Dr. Fairchild’s observation that collected plants outlast their collector.
It is quoted here in full:

“What one collects in the shape of opinions, ‘data,’ ‘facts,’ and ‘figures,’ has a rather small chance of being passed on to others, a small chance of ‘doing some good,’ as the saying goes; whereas what one collects in the shape of seeds and plants has a very good chance of growing and becoming something worth while to somebody long after the shadows fall.”

~ David Fairchild, “Garden Islands of the Great East” (1943)

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Neat New Plant

By John Banta

Just coming onto the market is Zamiculcas zamifoloia variety Raven. It was awarded the best new plant of 2019 at the TPIE show in January. It is fully protected by a patent held by the Dutch growers. I hear that Enid will have a limited number of the patented plants available for sale by the end of April. This remarkable plant appeared as a chance mutant in the Dutch nursery. The newly expressed red pigment, anthocyanin, masks over the green of the chlorophyll resulting in the stunning black color of the entire plant. This plant is almost as easy to care for as a plastic plant. Forgetting to water it for a week or so doesn’t seem to do much harm and it propagates easily from leaf cuttings. But a word of caution, the patent rights don’t allow you to sell any plants you may produce.

Happy growing!

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Welcome to new members

Milagro Perez Distel & Michael Distel  Joey Kernisky
Grisel Perez & Alina Espinosa  Lizzie Allen-Perez & Bill Wilson
Denise Chin Puee
On March 29—30, 2019 Simpson Park*, hosted the 58th annual Metropolitan Miami Flower Show. The show was a National Garden Club event and participants include members of various South Florida garden clubs. The theme of the show was “The Magic of Disney” represented by floral arrangements imaginatively depicting Disney theme parks, characters or movies.

Congratulations to TFEPS member Sallye Jude, a member of the Coral Gables Garden Club. Sallye’s creative interpretation of Cinderella placed Second in the show as well as her Phlegmariuries squarrosus in the plant collections category.

*Simpson Park Hammock, 55 SW 17 Road, Miami, is one of the last remaining tracts of the Brickell Hammock.
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Simpson Park club house
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