



Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc. Newsletter

Volume 12, Issue 2

Editor: Reggie Whitehead February 2010

January in Review

New TFEPS president, Mike Twyford called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. Steve and Marie Nock donated the raffle plants; and Marie gave a wonderful description of the plants that were brought in.

The treasurer's report yielded a healthy balance. The always delicious refreshment table was stocked by Emalyl Israel, Martha Bogaard, and Sally Jude.

Marie Nock introduced the speaker for the evening, the well-known plantsman Jeff Searle. Jeff is the owner of Searle Brothers Landscaping, part of which is The Rainforest Collection, a collection of extraordinary palms. Jeff and his family, both elder and junior, have been part of a family-run business for 28 years in the Ft. Lauderdale area. This would make them one of the older family wholesale businesses in the nursery trade in South Florida. The nursery specializes in palms first and foremost, but also has a wide range of crotons, Cordylines, woody ornamentals and exotic plants. Jeff actively imports, seeks out and introduces new plants. His semi-annual Palm Festivals are something of local legend, and classify as "destination events".

Jeff made note of the exceptional spate of cold weather we've all endured recently, which did no good for our collections. With over a week of nighttime weather near freezing, many "ironclad" plants suffered damage. Jeff brought up several tactical points to be aware of:

- if plants shed their leaves after the cold weather, that's good; the plants will recover.
- if plants retained scorched, brown leaves, that's bad; the plants will struggle to recover, or have sustained major damage.

gle to recover, or have sustained major damage.

A good general rule is to wait until new growth is produced before doing any pruning, so that the "real" damage can be seen, as opposed to what appears to be wilted/damaged leaves.

Jeff suggested 2 books for further reading: *Florida's Beautiful Crotons*, and *Crotons of the World*. As for using Crotons in the landscape, Jeff suggested several key factors for successful growth and display:

- most crotons prefer a semi-shaded or bright filtered-light location.
- attempt to modify the soil to produce a slightly acid or neutral soil pH. Organic matter, mulch, compost and acid fertilizers will help. (secretary's note).
- good soil drainage is important; Crotons don't like wet roots.
- mass plantings of one variety make a bigger impact than one-by-one

Next Meeting, Monday, February 22

The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society presents *Chris Migliaccio* who will speak on **Understory Palms for the South Florida Garden**.

Chris is a professor at Miami-Dade College, who will give us excellent advice regarding growing these great plants in our south Florida climate. He has traveled extensively and collected seeds in his journeys and has grown beautiful specimens as well. This month's Raffle Table provided by *Tim Anderson*.

plantings.

- don't plant slow-growing types next to fast-growing types.
- mass plantings of multiple varieties make more visual punch than widely spaced plantings.
- green/yellow leaved varieties do better in full sunlight e.g. 'General Paget', 'Fishbone', 'Davis # 1' / '# 7' / '# 10'
- pink / pastel / light red varieties do best in filtered sunlight e.g. 'Polychrome', 'Stained Glass', 'Claude Lorraine', 'Raphael'

Large-leaved varieties can be used for accent areas or as large specimens, e.g. 'Diane', 'Monarch', 'Jungle Queen', and 'Charles Rutherford'.

Crotons can be classified in several ways, most commonly by leaf type. Jeff listed a number of types, and listed examples of each e.g. Broad Leaf—'General Paget' Oak Leaf—'Irene Kingsley' Semi-Oak Leaf— 'Sybil Griffen' Spiral Leaf— 'Dreadlocks' Narrow Leaf—'Stoplight' Very Narrow Leaf—'Majesticum' Small Leaf—'Gonzales' Interrupted Leaf—'Coral Shower' Recurved Leaf—'Ram's Horn'

There are several notable names in Croton hybridizing, some of which are familiar to many of us. Starting in the 1920s and 1930s, Crotons became more popular, and here are some of the luminary people who worked with them and hybridized them:

Aubrey Christian

Henry Coppinger of Miami

Charles Rutherford

(Review continued on page 2)

The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc.

Officers for 2010

(Review continued from page 1)

President	
Mike Twyford	(305) 444-6332
Vice President	
Marie Nock	(305) 232-2257
Secretary	
Craig Morell	(305) 667-1173
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Raffle Table	
Skye Palmer	(305) 595-9291
Webmaster	
Bob Benaim	(305) 793-9755

Board of Directors will consist of the above officers and chairs; and the following individuals.

Steve Forman	(305) 662-2368
Debbie Lamb	(305) 251-8675

Rudy Bachman

Ralph Davis of Miami

Robert Halgrim (of Ft. Myers, an old friend of Thomas Edison)

John Bender of Plantation

(Secretary's note: Jeff has a huge and well-named collection of Crotons, and is very active in acquiring and propagating them for sale. He should be included in this list. Also included should be Bob Alonzo, and Johnny Shelton, 2 more legends in the Croton world).

Jeff went on to cover the details of propagating Crotons, which are primarily by cuttings and air-layers, although seed propagation is also done. Seed propagation yields interesting results, and is often the source of new varieties. Salient points to remember regarding cutting propagation are to use healthy cuttings, use well-drained soil e.g. ½ potting soil and ½ perlite or pine bark; take cuttings ideally in mid-Summer, although anytime from March to November is OK.

There is a debate over whether to leave the leaves on the cutting or remove them. The old dogma is to cut half of each leaf off to reduce desiccation loss. Many commercial growers use a mist-bench setup, which requires a timer to activate an electric valve, spraying water on the cuttings to keep them from drying out.

To use air-layers, there are similar concerns as cuttings, with some differences, too:

- start air-layers in mid-Summer
- choose a 2'-3' stem section even 4' length is good
- use a sharp clippers, box cutter, or scissors to make a clean circular incision around the stem to interrupt the vascular flow of auxins
- use a small clean brush to apply rooting hormone to the incision
- apply moistened sphagnum moss completely around the incision, and wrap with aluminum foil tightly to maintain moisture around the moss until the air-layer is well rooted.

Jeff concluded his excellent program with a slide show. Of special men-

(Review continued on page 3)

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(Continued from page 2)

tion are that 2 long time TFEPS members are infirmed—Tricia Frank, and Leigh Elliott. Our thoughts and best wishes go to both of them for full recoveries. Also of note is that Reggie’s stage performance in *Porgy and Bess* is due in Miami on Sunday, March 14 (for more information contact **Tom Moore (305) 666-0219 or Tommoore7@aol.com**).

The program concluded at 9:25 and was enjoyed by all, including some international visitors.

(Another secretary’s note: speakers of this caliber are one of many good reasons to join this society. The show of plants and local knowledge disseminated were exceptional, and would be hard to find in reference books.)

Respectfully submitted,
Craig Morell, Esq.
Secretary

Michael Capasso presents
THE GERSHWINS'
Porgy AND Bess
by
George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy Heyward and Ira Gershwin
75TH ANNIVERSARY
Produced in association with Willette Murphy Klausner
Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright

Sunday, March 14 — 3 p.m.

*with Reggie Whitehead
as Sportin' Life
(‘It Ain’t Necessarily So’ and There’s A Boat
That’s Leavin’)*

Dade County Auditorium
2901 W. Flagler Street
Miami, FL
General Box Office (305) 547-5414
or www.ticketmaster.com

Raffle Tables for 2010

February 22.....Tim Anderson
 March 22Richard Button
 April 26
 May 24Ree Garden and Rebecca Tannenbaum

Please make check payable to:

**Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society
6880 S. W. 75 Terrace
South Miami, FL 33143**

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Being Right Isn't Always Alright

by John Banta

I thought that this month's newsletter would be about the plastic grocery bag. I know that some think it is a great waste of petroleum. When I read about a neat method of making plastics without using any petroleum products I thought a change was certain.

One nice thing about being wrong. It sure makes for a great learning experience. Lactic acid is easily produced from bacterial fermentation of corn and sugar. Tin salts are utilized to help remove excess water produced in the polymerization process. The resulting polylactic acid polymer is biodegradable and can be formed into films, fibers and sheets. It has such wonderful medical uses that using it for grocery bags doesn't seem eco-

nomical.

However, with millions of barrels oil used by us to produce plastic grocery bags, we need only to look at the shoppers in Third World countries to see the best answer. Technology doesn't provide as good an answer as social change does. Most shoppers in tropical markets wouldn't think of leaving the house with out their strong, sturdy woven hemp bag that could handle 3 bowling balls without fear of failure. Maybe the time for reusable, attractive shopping bags is here. A smart choice for being green. ***Next time: Tomato pleasures.***

Next Meeting, Monday, February 22, Chris Migliaccio, Understory Palms, 7:30 p.m.

This Newsletter is also available through PDF and our www.tfeps.org website.

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South Miami, FL 33143

