



Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc. Newsletter

Volume 12, Issue 1

Editor: Reggie Whitehead January 2010

November/December in Review

Tom Moore called the meeting to order at 8:10 on Tuesday the 23rd of November. The raffle table was provided by, and explained by Peter Kouchalakos, of PCK Orchids. The hospitality table was lavishly decked out by Emaly Israel and Martha Bogaard. The treasurer's report was not given.

For the November meeting of the Tropical Fern and Exotic Plant Society, Duane Peterson from Wichita, Kansas spoke about fern culture. His primary focus for the program was on fern propagation. His specialties are Boston and Maidenhair Ferns, in the genera *Nephrolepis* and *Adiantum*, respectively. Duane originally started growing just Boston Ferns but diversified into the more petite world of Maidenhair ferns, as well as a range of temperate ferns like the exquisite Japanese Painted Fern. Duane sells his ferns at sales and shows throughout the country and does limited mail-order as well. Duane also had a sales tent at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden Ramble. Duane's first topic was how to determine when a fern needs dividing or propagation. In some cases, a fern needs to be divided when the plant has used up all its available growing media, when you want extra plants to sell, or when it's ungainly-large. "If you water it, and the water runs out of the pot without wetting the media, it's time to divide it" was his sage advice.

Regarding division-propagation of Boston Ferns (*Nephrolepis*), look for existing "division" lines, i.e. natural gaps in the growth of the fern where a clump can be removed. Use a sharp knife or clippers, and make a cut through the topmost ring of rhizomes, but not all the way through the center of the root ball. Then pull the divisions apart slowly, slowly separating the roots

and rhizomes without cutting them apart. This is a more natural and less damaging way to propagate these ferns. If you cut the division apart like a slice of cake, then you'll sever the long winding rhizomes which may be growing in opposite directions, damaging the plant. Repot the plant and water it thoroughly.

For Boston Ferns, Duane uses a potting mix of 1/3 Baccto potting mix, 1/3 Canadian peat moss, and 1/3 perlite. Duane also demonstrated the technique of cutting a 12 inch section of slender stolon, found hanging over the pot edge, and which is often mistaken for a green root. If the stolon already has a small nub of a plantlet started, the propagation will be much faster. He puts several of these stolons into a sterilized plastic shoebox with 2-3 inches of Pro-Mix BX soilless potting mix, which is already sterile in the bag. Duane will lay the stolons on the Pro-Mix BX, and cover over 3" of stolon, then leave a space uncovered, then cover a few inches of the stolon, and so on. In a few months, plantlets will form. With rhizome propagation

of footed ferns, cut off a rooted piece of rhizome and pot into long fiber sphagnum moss.

Duane also touched on propagation of viviparous ferns, such as Lady Ferns and Mother Ferns. These are propagated by laying the entire cut frond onto a layer of Pro-Mix, making sure the frond is pinned to the mixture. The small fernlets (called bulbils) will root into the mix, and can be cut free when the plantlets are a few inches tall. Some of the larger tree-type ferns such as *Angiopteris* can be propagated by removing the plantlets which form on the trunks. There are species of trunk-forming ferns in the genera *Cibotium* and *Sadleria* which also form these offsets. Duane went on to show the techniques of spore propagation, in which cleanliness of the growing media and containers is paramount for success. There are numerous techniques for spore propagation, but the simplest is to sow spores onto a sterilized peat mix like Pro-Mix BX. He sterilizes the container, usually a clear plastic shoebox, with a 10% bleach solution. He sterilizes the medium by placing the mix into a heat-proof container, adding water to saturation, covering it, and heating it in the microwave oven on High for 10 minutes. He pours the steaming mix into the shoeboxes, and covers the boxes quickly to prevent any contamination. Just sow the spores onto the sterile mix after it's cooled off, and wait several weeks. This is a good way, albeit a slow one, to produce a lot of ferns. Some Maidenhair ferns sow their spores right after a heavy rainstorm. Duane showed that the spores are extremely tiny, and are hardly visible, noting that there is a lot of extra material which is shed when the spores are ripe enough to come off the plant. If you can see the spores easily, he said, they're possibly not the spores.

His display of different maiden hair

(Continued on page 3)

Next Meeting, Monday Jan. 25

This meeting we present **Jeff Searle** who will discuss *Coloring Your Garden with Crotons*.

Jeff is known to many as a premiere palm specialist, but he also has wonderful knowledge of **Crotons**, beautiful plants that do well in any type of climate. Jeff will speak about how easy they are to cultivate in your garden.

The evening's Raffle table will be supplied by John Lucas. See you at 7:30 p.m.

The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc.
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Board of Directors will consist of the above officers and chairs; and the following individuals.

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*Message from
 the EX-President*

As I type this, I am in a lonely apartment in (very cold) New York City, in rehearsals for *The 75th Anniversary of Porgy and Bess Tour* (a U.S tour, perhaps coming to a town near you!). Those of you who know me, knew that this might happen for me — and it is happening and I am very happy.

I leave the office of the presidency of the Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, with mixed emotions. Since our beginning, I've wanted only the best for us and the plant community of South Florida, and beyond.

With the generous talents of those who have served our society so well, we arrived at 10 years, in excellent shape. We've grown immensely in stature and we are looked upon as a successful plant society. I want to thank all of you for 10 tremendous years of friendship and camaraderie.

We are moving into the next decade with new and talented officers. We are very pleased to have as our president, **Mr. Mike Twyford**. Many of you know Mike because of his wonderful work in the Begonia society. Our vice president is **Mrs. Marie Nock**, of Ree Gardens — need I say more? We were very fortunate to have **Mr. Craig Morell** (of Pinecrest Gardens) as our secretary. (When Craig moved back to Miami from Boca Raton, I knew that the horticulture scene of Miami would indeed blossom once more). And we have my dear friend and fellow founder of our group, **Tom Moore**, continuing as treasurer. I present to you a fine group of officers who will continue to lead this great plant society. I want to congratulate them for volunteering to move forward with our great club.

Our president, Mike Twyford has asked me to stay on as Editor of the newsletter. I will still contribute to the society, but in the next few months, I will be unable to attend meetings (because of a very busy tour schedule).

Good Luck to you all, and once again, thank you for giving me, many great years to look fondly back on.

Reggie 'Sportin Life' Whitehead

ferns was impressive, adding that the ferns like to be consistently moist, never dry out, and fertilized lightly. He uses a general purpose 20-20-20 fertilizer, at low dilutions, every 3 months. He adds crushed oyster shells to the potting mix for Maidenhair ferns, since they like calcium in the diet. Agricultural Lime will also work well, too. The preferred potting mix for Maidenhair ferns is 1/2 Canadian peat moss and 1/2 perlite. Duane had a variety of Maidenhair ferns, from a misty variety that looked like green fog, to a highly ruffled variety called 'Farleyense'. The program concluded at 9:15. — With all good wishes,

Craig Morell

December in Review

Our December Holiday Party was held on Tuesday, December 22. Dr. and Sallye Jude played the quintessential hosts to our group at their beautiful waterfront estate in Coral Gables. The South Florida weather was beautiful, allowing for us to mingle and dine out under the stars of a gentle December night.

Guests were served various hors d'oeuvres prepared by various members of the society. Our beautiful meal, coordinated by Emaly Israel and Martha Bogaard was another magnificent feast, as only the members of the Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society can do. Our table(s) were filled a beautiful Honeybaked Spiral-cut Ham, a couple of turkeys, salads, a special pineapple dressing (thank you Elaine!), macaroni salad, stuffing, various breads, and a wide assortment of vegetable dishes.

On to the dessert table. Let me just say that we were all trying to taste a little of every sweet morsel provided at the party, and sadly our waistlines are none too happy right now. BUT, a New Year is upon us, and the important thing is that "A Good Time was Had By All."

Raffle Tables for 2010

January 25 John Lucas
 February 22 Tim Anderson
 March 22 Richard Button
 April 26
 May 24 Ree 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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More Green Optimism

by John Banta

I know we have looked at genetic manipulation of plants in the past few newsletters but when remarkable events promise to effect our lives to such a degree we need to be aware of their dimensions. In 1913 Fritz Haber developed a process that captured nitrogen from the air and enabled it to be used as fertilizer. Of the three essentials for plant growth nitrogen was the limiting factor. This new abundance changed agriculture and the threat of human hunger became less serious. But then other problems cropped up. Too much nitrogen applied to crops fouled out waters and added oxides of nitro-

gen to the air that contribute more than carbon dioxide does to global warming.

Recent discoveries have shown that an enzyme called alanine aminotransferase produced by a gene from barley plants enables modified crops (i.e. rice, wheat and corn)to produce full yields with greatly reduced amounts of nitrogen fertilizer. New crops that are resistant to high salt levels and drought are sure to follow. Genetic modification can provide answers to many of our pressing problems. ***Next time, The End of the Plastic Grocery Bag!***

Next Meeting, Monday, January 25, Jeff Searle, Colorful Crotons, 7:30 p.m.

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

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