



Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc. Newsletter

Volume 12, Issue 5

Editor: Reggie Whitehead May 2010

April in Review

Date—April 26, 2010

Speaker- Craig Morell

Topic - Feeding the Needy- Old, new, and Almost Forgotten techniques

Treasurer's report balance- \$ 14,000 "more or less", pending the tally from the Fairchild Garden Spring-sale.

Meeting was called to order at 7:45 by President Mike Twyford

Hospitality- Mike thanked Emaly Israel and Martha Bogaards for arranging a wonderful refreshment table.

Raffle provided by— Craig Reid

Mike asked vice president Marie Nock to introduce our speaker for the evening, Craig Morell.

Craig is the horticulturist for Pinecrest Gardens, the new persona of the old Parrot Jungle site. He is working on renovating the gardens there, which is a park in the Village of Pinecrest.

Craig, a career horticulturist and lifelong plant addict, has a broad background with plants in many settings, but admits he still has a lot to learn. He brought along with him both his insights and fertilizer samples for the evening's speech. Craig began the evening by clarifying the topic of the evening, "Feeding the Needy." However, he did offer a caveat for the evening, given his

governmental position: "No Guarantees expressed or implied." With this caution, he continued by mentioning that everyone has their own methods and formulas for fertilizing. If gardeners are getting good results with their techniques, there is no need to change; the program is meant to bring a deeper knowledge to the topic for those who may not know the why and how some products do their job.

While working at Pinecrest Garden in the first month of employment, his first attempt with an organic fertilizer like Milorganite, was in retrospect a bad idea. Given how Milorganite, which is basically processed human waste, breaks down rapidly in our South Florida hot and humid climate, a public and highly attended public Garden is not the best place for an odiferous fertilizer, especially in September.

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It's Show Time

In just a few short weeks, we will sponsor our Annual Show and Sale. We are feverishly preparing last minute details for the Show and Sale on June 5th and 6th at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden.

A few reminders: We need your plants in order to make our show and sale fantastic. You may pick up Plant Entry Cards Entry Sheets at the May 24 meeting, OR, you may pick them up and fill them out when you bring in your display plant(s) on Thursday, June 3. All plants are welcome. ALL PLANTS.

We will be at the Garden from 10:00 a.m. until 7 p.m. Please try to have your plants there early so that they may be properly and beautifully displayed in our landscaped exhibit.

We can also use a little manpower with setting up the show and sale on June 3. If you are planning to help with this task, it would be great if you arrived around 11 a.m. Of course you may come earlier — we will spend that time organizing the room and preparing it for the display.

On Friday, June 4, we will have our Appreciation Luncheon. Members who have donated their time in setting up the Show and Sale are honored at this luncheon. We would love to have as many members as possible attend. It is our Feast among the Plants. Luncheon will begin at noon.

Lastly, if you would like to volunteer at our Member's Table, or Holding area, we would love to have you. We will have a sign-up sheet at our May 24 meeting. If you would like to volunteer for the Show weekend, but are unable to attend the May 24 meeting, please call Reggie or Tom at (305) 666-0219.

Next Meeting, Monday, May 24

The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society presents **Dr. Jeff Block** who will speak on *The Complete Tropical Garden*. Jeff is one of South Florida's leading horticulturist whose garden is a highlight on many garden tours. Jeff will provide a talk, via a slide presentation to illustrate how other gardeners can make the most of their own gardens. See you there.

The Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society, Inc.
Officers for 2010

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| President | | |
| | Mike Twyford | (305) 444-6332 |
| Vice President | | |
| | Marie Nock | (305) 232-2257 |
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| Treasurer | | |
| | Tom Moore | (305) 666-0219 |
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| | Emaly Israel | (305) 235-0886 |
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| | Marie Nock | (305) 232-2257 |
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| | Juan Espinosa-Almodovar | (305) 444-3103 |
| Raffle Table | | |
| | Skye Palmer | (305) 595-9291 |
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| | 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 |
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| Reggie Whitehead | (305) 613-5944 |

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This provided a good avenue for introducing the various types and uses of fertilizers.

Craig talked about the consistency and classes of fertilizers, e.g. organic versus synthetic, soluble versus controlled release, and complete versus single-factor.

He spoke about the nitrogen(N), phosphorus (P) and potassium(K) contributions for healthy plant growth. He reminded us that nitrogen is essential for greening up plants. The phosphorus helps promote root growth. Craig sheepishly admitted that he is still not thoroughly convinced of the nutritional value of potassium, other than its overall promise of general good health for plants.

However, he did mention that when looking for a fertilizer, a “balanced” fertilizer was still a good idea e.g. a 20-20-20 or 13-13-13 blend. Another essential for fertilizing is that you be consistent with your applications, from year to year, on some type of regular schedule. He recommends a general landscape fertilizer schedule of 3 times a year-- Spring, Summer and Fall. “If it isn’t water or concrete, feed it” was the end comment of this section, meaning that you should fertilize your whole property, rather than plant-by-plant.

Controlled-Release

These tend to come as pellets and are small and convenient; and they are generally synthetic, such as Osmocote and Nutricote (which is also widely available as Dynamite, at garden shops such as Home Depot). Osmocote is a temperature-released fertilizer, and subsequently here in South Florida, it breaks down more rapidly than it does in climates that are not as hot. When this type of fertilizers is used on the soil surface, it can break down too fast. The pellets can burst or re-

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lease too much fertilizer and can damage the plants. Craig offered a tip about using some of the heat activated fertilizers: he recommended a method call “dibbling” or pushing the pellets deep into the soil, which tends to be cooler. And an added bonus to dibbling is that because the pellets are below the soil top, and weed seeds tend to take root on top of the soil, the tactic discourages weed growth.

Organic fertilizers

These ingredients can be purchased separately and blended together in a medium. For examples, he talked about Bone Meal, and Blood Meal, but recommended that we do some homework before we applied products without prior experience. Blended and balanced rose fertilizers make good starting points for organic fertilizer programs.

Many organic fertilizers are chronically low in iron, and the user should be aware of this when attempting to ‘go green’ by using such fertilizers on demanding plants like Heliconias, gingers, and flowering plants. There are soluble and slow-release organic fertilizers, but most off the shelf products are slow-release. Older and presumably reliable fertilizers such as manure and Milorganite tend to promote greenery, and little else. The commonest fertilizers at garden centers are soluble or quick-release products, most commonly synthetic.

Soluble fertilizers

There are perhaps 400 soluble fertilizers available, and some are designated by unusual NPK markers, such as 13.4-0-44.5 which is potassium nitrate. This has proven to be beneficial on a very wide array of plants, but is a bit hard to buy at most retail outlets. Craig brought up a comic-tragic aspect of this most useful fertilizer: it is called Saltpeter in old parlance, and is a component of gunpowder. Therefore it is regulated by the Homeland Security Agency, and tracked by such. Despite the government watchdogs, it is a wonderful general and all around fertilizer. Urea, with a 45-0-0 analysis, is often used by palm growers to green up leaves, but is quite strong and should be used very gently on sensitive plants. Monopotassium phosphate, with a 0-50-10 analysis, may have benefits on orchids and bromeliads, perhaps not so much on ferns.

Craig gave us insightful history of the origin of the name of Peter’s [20-20-20]. Apparently, Peters was developed by Jack Peters, who then sold his company to WR Grace, which was purchased by Scotts Fertilizers, which then dropped the Peters brand name and re-named it Jack’s.

On an aside, Craig asked member Chad Husby from the Montgomery Botanical Center to speak about a fired-clay substrate called Turface with regard to his successes with it on primitive ferns and cycads. The medium holds fertilizer whole still permitting air and water drainage, and won’t compact easily, making it a great option for a long-term potting medium. Bob Benaim mentioned that Bodsai growers use Turface as part of their media to pot up miniature trees. Chad mentioned that he has published many of his findings in HortScience magazine.

In the debate over whether organic is better than synthetic, he mentioned that organic fertilizers tend to be less polluting than synthetic, but there are too many variables to work with to make such a statement, citing his earlier caveat of ‘no guarantees, expressed or implied’. Organics do not necessarily mean that they are safer; and better is definitely debatable. Craig however did mention that organics generally are good fertilizers, but they tend to be metal deficient, particularly iron which is essential to healthy plant growth. A little advance homework is wise in starting a new program, as with a diet or exercise program.

Craig concluded the program at 9 p.m.

*Tropical Fern
&
Exotic Plant Society, Inc.*

Annual Show and Sale

Saturday and Sunday

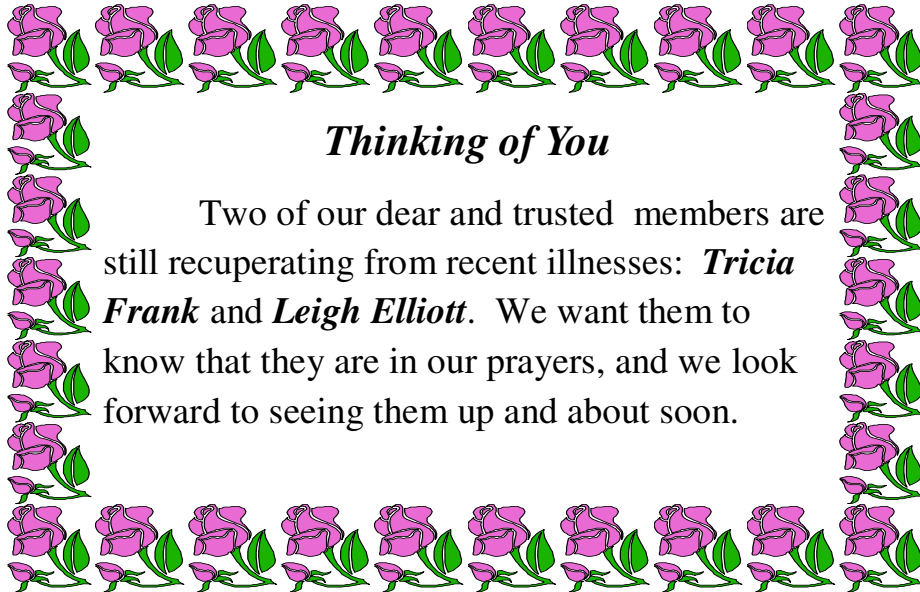
June 5 & 6

*Fairchild Tropical Botanic
Garden*

Hours: 9:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

New Library Addition

Ted Smits, one of our founding members recently donated a
an excellent copy of the plant reference book *Exotica 3*, by A. B.
Graf. We gratefully thank Ted for thinking of us.



Thinking of You

Two of our dear and trusted members are
still recuperating from recent illnesses: *Tricia*
Frank and *Leigh Elliott*. We want them to
know that they are in our prayers, and we look
forward to seeing them up and about soon.

Raffle Tables for 2010

May 24Rebecca and Duane Tannenbaum

Please make check payable to:

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

Individual Member \$15. Household Membership \$17.

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The Keepers of the Name

by John Banta

A plant without a name is like an orphan. The value of a plant depends upon the correct application of its scientific name. Like any foreign language, plant names flee our memories through lack of use. One of my closest plant friends, Joe Wright died recently and only now do I realize how much I depended upon him to keep my plant names from fading away. Joe was never shy about questioning a doubtful name I used in error. Now that is a good friend. There are still many good plant collectors around that clarify any plant discussion by their remarkable ability to recall plant names. Craig Morell is in that elite group as is Jessie Durko, Richard Button, Sid Gardino, Steve & Marie Nock, and that Wickiepedia of plant names, Michael Fererro. Fortunately, we have the

Tropical Fern & Exotic Plant Society to refresh our appreciation of plant names.

All too often good plant names are lost in the mists of time. I remember the amazement in seeing Ralph Davis's array of Croton hybrids. I guess I should correctly call them **Codiaeums**. One stands out in my memory its huge leaves sporting only great splashes of white and red. Ralph called it "*Merry Christmas*".

Bob Alonzo and a few other dedicated **Codiaeum** lovers are attempting to keep the hybrid names conferred by their breeders applied to the right plants. This is a daunting task with few rewards. We can all be of help by regarding plant names as special honors belonging to the objects of our affection.

Next Meeting, Monday, May 24, Dr. Jeff Block, The Complete Tropical Garden, 7:30 p.m.

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

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6880 S. W. 75 Terrace
South Miami, FL 33143*