

# Bromeliad Care

Bromeliaceae

Bromeliads are unusual, but easy tropical plants to grow. They are epiphytic, meaning they grow on living organisms. In this case most bromeliads grow high in the canopy of the rain forest on trees and other plant material, for physical support. Their nutrients come from rotting leaves, dead insects, animal and insect droppings, dust, and rainfall in their natural habitat. These nutrients especially the water is collected by a specialized rosette of leaves called a "vase". Nutrients can also be absorbed through leaf scales and by their roots too. Despite being epiphytes these tropical beauties are readily adaptable to growing indoors in pots. Their colorful foliage and inflorescence can last six months to a year or more with the proper care below.

**Temperature:** Tolerant of a wide range, but prefer 55-85 degrees F. Cooler night temperatures (55-65 degrees) may enhance the color of their foliage and can extend bloom time.

**Light:** Bright, indirect, or filtered sunlight from a southern window is excellent. Eastern and western exposures are suitable too. Soft, thin-leaf species with solid green or variegated foliage prefer less light than thick, silver, fuzzy leaf varieties like the Tillandias (Air Plants) or the Silver Vase Bromeliad. Pineapple bromeliads thrive in direct sunlight.

**Watering:** If watering the soil, water thoroughly, let the water drain out, and reapply water when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. If you choose to keep the "vase" of leaves filled with water change the water at least once a week. Fresh filtered or distilled water is best poured from a plastic watering can. Metal from a copper or steel watering can is toxic to the plant.

**Soil:** Use a well-drained, porous mix like one part orchid bark with one part sphagnum moss, and one part perlite. Always use small pots with very good drainage. They can also be grown on pieces of bark or driftwood with pockets drilled out to hold the roots. We recommend growing bromeliads in pots for the average gardener or homeowner.

**Fertilizer:** Apply a 1/2 strength all-purpose houseplant fertilizer once a month to the soil during the growing season. You can also add three drops of liquid all-purpose fertilizer to your spray mister on a monthly basis and spray the entire plant.

**Humidity:** Spray misting with fresh filtered or distilled water or place the pot on a humidity tray of moistened gravel greatly increases the humidity which is very beneficial indoors.

**Propagation:** Please see the back of this flyer.



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# How to Propagate Your Bromeliad:

We recommend asexual propagation for faster development of a mature, blooming bromeliad. This requires separating an offset or “pup” from the perimeter of an out of bloom mother plant.

Once the bloom and inflorescence fades remove it down to the “vase” rosette of leaves. The mother plant slowly dies after flowering, but may still produce offsets for one to two years. Allow the offsets to continue to grow until they are 1/3 as tall as the original plant. You can pull the Bromeliad with offsets up out of the pot to check on the condition of their roots before separating. Only remove offsets with healthy, white, roots. Cut with a serrated knife to separate all of the pups and their roots.

Plant the new pups in pots. Give them an adjustment period of 6 months to mature before trying to force them to bloom. It may just bloom on its own for you!

If a mature plant seems stubborn to bloom, first try exposing it to ethylene gas. Do this by placing the potted plant into a clear plastic bag along with a ripe apple that has been cut in half or a ripe unpeeled banana. Make sure the soil is moist first. Close up the bag for four to seven days in indirect sunlight. You want to keep the humidity high inside the bag. The fermenting fruit will give off ethylene gas, which in return stimulates the bromeliad to initiate bloom. You should see an inflorescence develop within eight to fourteen weeks.

Another system to force blooming on healthy mature plants is to mix a quarter ounce of calcium carbide (from any drugstore) with one quart of warm water and fill the bromeliad vase or rosette with this solution. Pour off the solution after 24 hours. Refill the vase or rosette with fresh filtered or distilled water and wait for the inflorescence, which should start to pop up in two to three months.

Bromeliads make wonderful gifts for anyone and any occasion. Even if you don't have the time or patience to try and propagate they last for a long time just the way they are.

When properly cultivated, bromeliads are rarely troubled by serious pests or diseases.