

THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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1998, No. 1

FROM YOUR BOARD

First, we wish to extend to all our very best wishes for 1998 and hope that you have an enjoyable and productive year. May the Green Thumb be with you!!

The Board held its first meeting on 24 January, 1998. The main thrust of discussions was aimed at strengthening our Society and identifying actions which would benefit the membership. Although the major points discussed by the Board will be reported at our next regular meeting on 14 March at Sherry Ballester's finca (see Meeting Announcement), there are two points which should be introduced now.

One pertains to the proposed Membership Directory. Questionnaires requesting addresses, telephone/fax contacts and comments or suggestions were attached to the last Newsletter. To date, only 10 have been returned. Please take time to fill out this questionnaire and bring it to our next meeting, or mail it to the Secretary, Martha Lankford, P. O. Box 3162, Mayaguez, P. R. 00681.

A second point refers to two types of classified ads which will be included in future Newsletters. Ads which offer plants or products for sale will be published at the rate of \$5.00 per 25 words or less. Make checks payable to Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico. Short non-commercial classified ads, announcements or want/search requests will be published without charge. All ads and applicable payments should reach the Secretary at least two months prior to any quarterly meeting.

For your information, the newly elected Board of Directors follows:

President	Bob Lankford	833-8821
Vice President	Bryan Brunner	899-1530 (Office)
Secretary/Treasurer	Martha Lankford	833-8821
Counselor	Emilia (Sherry) Ballester	827-3121
Counselor	Rafael Benitez	723-7769
Counselor	Judy Nelson	839-2040

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Some Thoughts About Heliconia Cultivars.

For a number of years, I have had nagging concerns about Heliconia cultivars (abbreviated CV) which is short for cultivated variety. My original concern (and I have others which I will discuss later) had to do with what appears to be contradictory usage of the horticultural term "cultivar". Strictly speaking, and quoting from Berry & Kress, a cultivar "is a plant that is maintained in cultivation and possesses distinguishing features that are retained when reproduced". Fine. No problem so far. But in the same paragraph, it states that, "Cultivars may be found in wild populations...". Now I have trouble. How can wild varieties be called cultivars without the test of cultivation? Only cultivation over time provides the proof that the perceived variation is indeed genetic in origin and not the result of environmental factors. Regarding environmental controls, I personally have observed in wild population in the Lesser Antilles that *Heliconia bihai* not only exhibits a continuum of striking differences from clump to clump within a surprisingly small area, but also I have observed distinct color differences between two inflorescences on the same plant. This logically brings to question the validity or even the desirability of identifying any particular variant within such a continuum as "the type". It also causes me to wonder about varietal stability within the framework of changeable environmental conditions and time. In support of this point, my own observations during seven years of cultivation of *Heliconia champneana* C/V Splash in my garden show a time-progressive change from typical C/V Splash to a form which now is almost uniformly dark red and nearly identical to illustrations of *H. champneana* C/V Maya Blood.

The evidence to date clearly shows that variations due to environmental factors exist and in fact should be expected in many species of Heliconia ___ variations arising from differences in soil chemistry, patterns of rainfall and humidity, changing light conditions, etc. It is also true that there are variants of Heliconia species which are of genetic origin, a condition substantiated by seedling propagation and, more recently, by DNA studies. But I admit to having considerable trouble when there is a quantum jump from collecting wild varieties in the jungle to reporting and naming them as new cultivars shortly thereafter. Clearly such so-called C/Vs have not been validated by cultivation and time. This in itself is not surprising in view of the rapidly growing popularity and economic importance of Heliconias. But when such untested varieties hit the marketplace, I treat myself to a generous dose of the Latin dictum, *Caveat emptor*.

In the next Newsletter, I will offer Part 2 of my concerns about Heliconia C/Vs and their names. Stay tuned!

Best wishes, Bob Lankford

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Starting Heliconia Rhizomes. Select only mature, healthy rhizomes which have one or more well - developed eyes or offshoots. Avoid rhizomes which are dehydrated or show

penetrating rot or insect bores. It is not advisable to plant rhizomes directly into the ground. Experience has shown that a start-up procedure reduces loss of rhizomes, many of which are both costly and difficult to obtain.

The following start-up procedures are recommended:

1. Wash and clean the rhizome with a soft brush, trim off any excess stem (leaving 6" - 10") and clip off any roots. Peel off any dry or decayed layers from both stem and rhizome.
2. Soak the rhizome in a fungicide, e.g.: Kocide at 1 tbs./gal. water for 30 to 45 minutes.
3. Place rhizome vertically in moistened sterile potting mix, e.g.: ProMix-BX in a 1 to 2 gallon plastic pot. Do not compact the mix and do not make it wet.
4. Add a light top dressing of balanced fertilizer and place the pot in a warm shaded locality. Note that direct sun on a black plastic pot can raise internal pot temperature to destructive levels. Water potting mix as needed.
5. After good growth has been obtained, usually in six months or more, transplanting into the ground is generally safe.

THE HELICONIA SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL: OUR RELATIONSHIP

In many respects the founding and development of our Society was inspired by the Heliconia Society International. This is clearly reflected in the similar objectives and goals of the two organizations. In fact, we initially thought that our Society might become a "chapter" or an affiliated body of HSI. This, however, was not possible within the existing organizational structure of HSI. We therefore are a completely independent or autonomous body as are the two Heliconia societies of Broward and South Florida. Despite the lack of any formalized affiliation or structured relationships, it is very clear that we, HSI and the other local societies have much in common and share similar goals and circumstances. It is therefore desirable to interact with these societies in such areas and activities which provide mutual benefits. Membership support is one such activity. For those interested in membership in Heliconia Society International, and its quarterly Bulletin, you should contact:

David Bar-Zvi, HSI Membership VP
Fairchild Tropical Garden
10901 Old Cutler Road
Miami, FL 33156-4296
Tel.: (305) 667-1651
Fax: (305) 667-8953

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Membership Dues. HSPR dues for the calendar year are payable at the first meeting or within 60 days thereafter. The annual dues structure for 1998 are:

Regular Member	\$ 20.00
Student Member	\$ 10.00
Honorary Member	None

Make checks payable to the Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico and give to Martha Lankford, P. O. Box 3162, Mayaguez, P. R. 00681

The 10th Heliconia Society International Conference will be convened on 22 -25 July, 1998 at the Allison Hotel in Singapore. The conference theme, "Gingering Across South - East Asia", will showcase many new plants of Gingers, Marantaceae, Orchidantas, Cannas, Strelitzias, Bananas and, of course, Heliconias. A pre-conference field trip, 18 -22 July, will visit Bangkok and Pattaya; a post-conference tour will visit Malacca and Taman Negara. For further information, contact:

Scenic Travel Pte. Ltd., Attn. Ms Maureen Goh
2 Mistri Road # 01-02, HMC Building, Singapore 079624
Tel.: 65-226-3673 Tele Fax: 65-226-2625
E-Mail: scenic @ pacific. net. sg

NEXT MEETING OF HSPR

The first meeting of HSPR for 1998 will be convened at 10:00 AM on Saturday, 14 March, 1998. The venue will be at the residence of Carlos Gonzalez and Emilia (Sherry) Ballester: Carr. 4406, Km. 3.8 (Interior), Bo. Anones, Las Marias. Telephones: 827-3121 and 827-2637. A location map is attached to the Newsletter for your convenience.

In addition to a short business session, the meeting will feature a presentation by Arnaldo Astacio, on his research on micro propagation (meristemming) of Heliconias, and a tour of Sherry's plantation of Heliconias and other ornamental and exotic plants.

Don't forget that we are instituting the Member's Forum at this meeting. Feel free to share experiences, exhibit plants, show evidence of problems, ask questions, and more. Your active participation in this part of the meeting is important.

NOTE: Please bring chairs for the meeting.