



Keeping Track of Your Collection

By Roberto Castro, Officer HSPR

On my visits to farms of HSPR members throughout the island I have observed stunning collections of heliconias and other Zingiberales. It is evident the effort, and in some cases the expense, that such collections require; being new to the world of heliconias, I can attest to that fact. As long as you plant just a few rhizomes it is easy to keep track of their location and the source. However, as we continue adding plants it becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of our collections. With so many species and cultivars available from so many sources the task of keeping track of what is where, when it was planted and when it blooms involves some degree of organization. Moreover, if the owner is not present it is nearly impossible to identify the different plants.

Spending a little time filing all this information goes a long way in improving our efforts and making them more enjoyable. Being trained as a scientist, I was always reminded to write down everything I did or observed. It is important to keep track of dates, methods, and anything that could help you or others arrive at conclusions.

We don't have to be too specific and write down everything we do, but keeping some basic information can make a big difference. It is just a matter of habit.

In my case, I keep a record of the following information in the computer: species, variety, source, date planted and tag number (Table 1). I prefer to use Excel, but any database program will do. (Note: It is not necessary to keep the information in a computer program; you can write down the information in a notebook. Just don't write in down on a loose piece of paper that can be easily lost.) I also keep another record with information on blooming period that is updated every month. This helps me know when a particular flower is available.

To help keep track of my collection, I label everything I plant using aluminum numbered tags and Aluma-Boss tags (Al-tags) (Fig. 1), available from mail order catalogs like Ben Meadows (www.benmeadows.com) or Forestry Suppliers (www.forestry-suppliers.com). The numbered tags are sold in sets of 100, permanently stamped with consecutive numbers (1-100, 101-200, etc.). You can even buy colored tags to make them eas-

Table 1. Example of collection information in the computer database program.

Species	Variety	Source	Tag #	Date
<i>H. bihai</i>	Giant Lobster Claw	Yoshioka	47	Dec-2003
<i>H. champneiana</i>	Maya Gold	Vivero Anones	7	Mar-2002
<i>H. vellerigera</i>	She Kong	Patillas	60	Jun-2002

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Dates to Remember

- HSPR Meeting, 10:00 am, Sunday, March 13, 2005. Farm of Roberto Castro and Gildreth González, Adjuntas, PR.
- Cinco Días con Nuestra Tierra Agricultural Fair, March 15-19, 2005, University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez, PR.

Keeping Track of Your Collection (continued)



Figure 1. Round aluminum numbered tag and Aluma-Boss tag used to label heliconia plants.

ier to locate. The Aluma-Boss tags are weatherproof with a paper core, and can be embossed on both sides with a pen or pencil. They are usually sold in packages of 500. To place the tags, I simply attach them to a piece of 1/2 inch PVC pipe about 2 feet long, driven into the ground next to the rhizome (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. PVC stake used to hold the aluminum identification tags.

Another useful trick is to mark the area around the plant using plastic flagging tape (available at engineering supply stores or

mail order catalogs). This is especially important around young, small plants, to identify their location in case the grass grows too tall or when it comes time to clear around the plant. It is amazing the damage a machete or a trimmer can do to a young plant

I have also found that dividing the farm in numbered or named sectors and recording what is planted in each one of them really helps when you want to locate a specific plant. It is especially helpful on big farms where the plants are scattered to meet specific plant requirements (illumination, drainage, space, etc.) or for esthetic reasons. I personally prefer names based on the dominating Zingiberales type (“Sector Gengibres”), dominating native species (“Sector Palma de Sierra”) or topography (“Sector Ruinas”). This information is also recorded in the lists.

One of the requirements of combining the collections of HSPR members as a cooperative HSI Zingiberales Conservation Repository of Puerto Rico is to properly identify and label all the plants. This will make the visit and evaluation of the collections by the committee members a lot easier. It will also make possible the creation by the HSPR of a master Zingiberales species/cultivar list with their locations on the island. Even if members do not wish to participate, it is still useful to keep a written record of their collections.

Growing Heliconias from Seed By Emilia Ballester, Past President and Assistant Editor HSPR

Growing heliconias from seed can be a very enjoyable experience. Seeds provide an inexpensive means of producing more plants without having to sacrifice clumps or dig rhizomes, and also increase the chance of producing a new cultivar or maybe even a hybrid! Plants grown from seed usually take longer to flower than those planted from rhizomes or chump divisions, but for those who are always on the lookout for something new, it’s worth a try. Few heliconia hybrids have been found in nature and there still aren’t any known man-made hybrids as in the case of orchids, roses, and other commercially grown flowers.

Mostly native to the American tropics, heliconias are pollinated by hummingbirds. Puerto Rico, for example, has nine different species of hummingbirds, two of them being endemic. They are the main pollinators of the native yellow *Heliconia caribaea*, and other heliconias that have been introduced to the island during recent years. These tiny birds with iridescent plumage are commonly seen not only around heliconia flowers, but also around the flowers of *Etilingera* sp.

Growing Heliconias from Seed (continued)

(torch gingers) and other related plants.

When pollinated, heliconias produce fruit, called a drupe, that is generally bright blue in color when fully ripe. When the fleshy blue part is removed, it contains from one to three very hard, black seeds (Fig. 1). These seeds can vary in size and shape among the different heliconia species (Fig. 2). Some can be as large and round as a pea (*H. aemygdiana*), while others can be long and thin as a grain of rice (*H. rostrata*). They are all similar in color and hardness.



Figure 1. Fresh fruit and cleaned seeds of *Heliconia magnifica*.



Figure 2. Clockwise from bottom: seeds of *H. collinsiana*, 'Flabellata', *H. chartacea*, *H. caribaea*, *H. ramonensis*, *H. regalis* and *H. mariae* (coin diameter is 18 mm or 0.7 in).

Some of these seeds have an aggressive start, while others seem to take forever to sprout. *Heliconia platystachys*, *H. imbricata* and *H. collinsiana*, all with very large round seeds,

sprout quickly and it's not uncommon to find seedlings growing close to the mother clump. The tiny seeds of *H. mariae*, a robust plant, also sprout very fast. *Heliconia chartacea*, with large rectangular seeds, can take up to a year to emerge!

It's easy to plant heliconia seeds. First, the fleshy blue pulp of the fruits is easily removed by soaking them in water overnight. The exposed seeds are then scrubbed against each other every time the water is changed. Water should be changed daily to avoid foul smells and the accumulation of mosquito larvae. When completely cleaned (this process could take two or three days), the seeds are then planted in pots or trays in germinating mix, places in a partially sunny spot, and watered regularly. To avoid problems with rodents (they really enjoy the seeds and any part of the blue pulp that



Figure 3. Seedlings of *Heliconia imbricata* in a 50 cell tray. Other seedlings of various species and ages are in 6 inch pots.

may have been left), it's not a bad idea to cover the trays with metallic wire mesh and secure the covers to the trays. After a while, the seeds will sprout, and a little thin green blade will emerge. Leaves will form, and the tiny heliconia seedling can be transplanted to a single pot when it's around 2 inches tall. A little fertilizer should be added to the pot mix to ensure good root growth.

Seedlings in a given batch will all be very similar in size (Fig. 3), but there might be slight differences in stem or leaf color, absence or presence of powdery wax on the stems and underside of the leaves, and dark or light color on the midrib of the leaves. Those seedling with a slight difference should be tagged, separated from the rest, and planted. Seedlings can take up to 2 years (some even more) to flower. The probabilities that it may resemble it's "mother" are very high. But those seedlings with some variation are work the effort. Who knows, a new cultivar or hybrid may be produced!

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HSPR

*Promoting Zingiberales in
Puerto Rico since 1996.*



The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc. was founded in 1996. The objectives of the society are to stimulate and promote the enjoyment and understanding of Heliconia and related plants of the order Zingiberales through education, research and communication, and to interact with the Heliconia Society International and other institutions which share similar interests, purposes or objectives.

Classified Ads

Please remember that HSPR members may publish one free classified ad per newsletter, to announce or sell goods and services related to heliconias or other Zingiberales, gardening, and similar areas. Ads should be 30 words or less. Additional ads for members or advertisements by non-members of HSPR are \$10 each. Please contact the Editor for more information. Ads must be submitted by email or fax to the Editor by the 15th of February, May, August or November to be included in the following issue of the HSPR Newsletter.

Ray Jerome — Magnificent documentary DVDs, approximately 1 hour each, \$10 plus \$5 S/H. “Heliconias #1: Pendant and Bihai Heliconias”, and “Heliconias #2: Orthotricha and Stricta Heliconias”. Call Ray at 787-886-3147.

Montoso Gardens — Large selection of heliconias, gingers, ornamental bananas and other Zingiberales. Visit our farm in Maricao (787-221-0614), or visit our website at www.montosogardens.com.

Heliconia Seeds For Sale. \$5 per packet. 50+ varieties. Contact Sherry Ballester at 787-827-3121. See list of available seeds at www.viveroanones.com.

President's Corner

Migdalia and I were pleased to host our last HSPR December meeting at our home. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. There was great comradeship, excellent food, a huge raffle, and Migdalia and I presented a “mini-concert” with our pianist, Frank Calzada. Frank also provided piano music throughout the meeting. It was wonderful to have Kelly Brooks be able to attend our meeting again.

Our next meeting will be held at the farm of Mr. and Mrs. Roberto Castro the second Sunday in March at 10:00 am. Instead of having a lecture, I decided that for this meeting I would like all of you to bring flower samples or photos of any new or unusual heliconias that have appeared on your farms. Explain how you found them, or what you saw in the seedlings that induced you to develop that particular plant. It has been some time since we have had an extensive “Show and Tell” and I know that several new developments and flowerings have occurred in our collections since the last one.

Also, at Bryan Brunner’s suggestion, we are presently working with Dr. José Abalo, of Venezuela, about HSPR paying airfare for he and his wife to come to Puerto Rico and give a one hour slide show/lecture to our members and to the general public. Hopefully we will be able to use the facilities at the University of Puerto Rico Botanical Garden in Río Piedras, and get free TV and media advertisements for this event. Dr. Abalo is one of our most knowledgeable authorities and collectors of Zingiberales. Migdalia and I will take Dr. and Mrs. Abalo around the island to show them some of our heliconia collections while they are here. The Abalos will be staying at our home and at the homes of other friends here. We hope to have Dr. Abalo’s lecture on Saturday, May 28.

Please bring your plants for raffle and sale, and bring anything of interest for our “Show and Tell” session.