

THE HSPR NEWSLETTER

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FROM YOUR BOARD

Almost since our founding more than two years ago, there has been intermittent discussion of the question of incorporating HSPR as a non-profit organization. It was pointed out that advantages of such action have mainly to do with being able to accept gifts, donations, bequests, etc. and the definition of legal responsibilities. Incorporation would also give the Society a legally based voice in affairs where we may wish to speak as a body. There were some questions, however, as to our status and stability as a Society -- Were we strong enough? -- Weren't we aiming too high? -- Were there alternatives?. As a result, we came to no decision and took no action.

At our last meeting in June, this matter was again brought up, with the consensus being that the President should look into the available options of at least copywriting our name, Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, or possibly going ahead with formal incorporation procedures. Following a discussion with his lawyer, Lic. Luis Enriquez Marin of Mayaguez, the President became convinced that incorporation under Puerto Rican law would be in the best interests of the Society and that any so-called disadvantages were reduced to the preparation of a short annual report to Hacienda. He then polled all the members of the Board by telephone (can we call this a telemeeting?) and received their unanimous agreement to proceed with incorporation procedures. He met again with Lic. Enriquez, a meeting lasting all of ten minutes, forms were filled out and signed and the document was ready for registration with the Departamento del Estado which expectedly is a lengthy operation. At the moment your President signed the form, however, our Society became a legally incorporated body. And in case you didn't notice, our Newsletter masthead, or membrete, now reads: The Heliconia Society of Puerto Rico, Inc. This is small but never-the-less significant step forward for our Society on its road to improvement. But perhaps more importantly, incorporation implies, implicitly if not explicitly, our collective commitment that HSPR not only shall live up to its full potential but also that it may become an integral component of horticultural development in Puerto Rico.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Some Thoughts About Ornamental Horticulture In P. R.

Sometime in the not too distant past, I began to sense that something critical was missing in the development of ornamental horticulture here in Puerto Rico. By that, I was thinking about the economic aspects, growing and selling mainly, but also developing new and attractive ornamentals. To me, the economic potentials in ornamental horticulture seemed to be not only underdeveloped but they were unrecognized as well. Oh, certainly, there was the truly outstanding "Festival de las Flores" in Aibonito each year. And there are not only numerous garden shops or "jardines" at every turn, but we also find supermarkets and huge chain stores offering ornamentals for sale. Let's face it, plants are a way of life in Puerto Rico

where growing is easy and enjoyable \$ as well. People simply like plants and they buy them, admittedly preferring the \$ 2.00 to 3.00 annuals, but enough in the aggregate that the ornamental market is valued at between \$ 40 and \$ 50 million annually.

Not too bad, you may say. But is this really the potential worth of ornamentals?. In one sense, the answer may be YES -- if we limit our thinking to the local market. Some would say our internal market is saturated, some would say over-saturated, especially considering the impact of the giant Margo Farms and the recent introduction of ornamentals by Marteck in Santa Isabel. This plight of our ornamental horticulture industry was graphically illustrated a few years ago by "Caribbean News", an English language weekly specializing in economic matters. The article, consisting of a number of interviews with small growers in the Aibonito area, pointed out a number of problems including lack of cooperation and interaction among the growers, an unpredictable market, dependence on annuals, the advent of competitive mass production and distribution, and apparent government disinterest and support for ornamental horticulture. From this point of view, yes, ornamental horticulture was at a standstill and its potential for significant development and expansion was somewhere between minimal and dismal

But as I became increasing aware of this situation, it slowly dawned on me that there was a big world out there, that there was a potentially important market beyond our shores. I am certain that I didn't discover this rather obvious fact. Those who have ordered plants or even cut flowers from Florida or Hawaii know that they themselves are part of Florida's or Hawaii's external market. The question is, Why doesn't Puerto Rico have similar external markets?. Why not have buyer's in the U.S.?. Why not in the whole humongous European Common Market?.

Our predictable climate and favorable growing conditions, our relatively low land and labor costs and our close proximity to markets, thousands of miles closer to Europe and the eastern U.S. than Hawaii, provide Puerto Rico with potential economic advantages that are as staggering as they are obvious. That's the good news! The bad news is that ornamental horticulture in Puerto Rico has lacked enlightened leadership, direction and orientation. The question now is, What can be done?, or Is anything being done?.

More on this matter in the next issue of the Newsletter. Again, stay tuned.

Best wishes, Bob Lankford.

NEWS BRIEFS

Congratulations to Marin Alto.

Those of HSPR who attended the annual "Festival de las Flores" at Aibonito this year were treated to a truly striking garden exhibit which was of special interests to our Society. Kelly and Susan Brooks and Judy Nelson of "Marin Alto" in Patillas presented an educational exhibit entitled "Conozca el Orden Zingiberales". Truly outstanding examples of seven of the eight families of the order Zingiberales were arranged in a tropical setting. Only the rare family Lowiaceae did not make the scene. The educational aspects of the exhibit were provided by informative but unobtrusive signs illustrating relationships within the order. The Marin Alto exhibit was of particular significance to HSPR, since it is this botanical order and its eight families which provide the focus and interest to our Society.

The high quality of the Marin Alto exhibit was evident by a near flood of trophies and ribbons awarded by the Festival judges -- among the trophies were: Best Educational Exhibit; Best Garden, Category I (for large growers); First Special Category (a new award from "Opalescence"); Grand Prize, Best Garden in Show; Best Heliconia (*H. vellerigera* 'King Kong'). There were also numerous ribbons for plant categories Costus, Gingers, Bananas, etc.). Again, our congratulations to Kelly, Susan and Judy.

The Pink Mealybug Threat.

With the nearly unpronounceable scientific name, *Maconellicoccus hirsutus*, a new plant pest is threatening the Puerto Rican agroindustry. Known variously as the Pink Mealybug, the Pink Hibiscus Mealybug; la Cochinilla Rosada de la Amapola, or simply Queresa, it has long been endemic to the Old World tropics and subtropics from West Africa to New Guinea and northern Australia -- but a serious pest only in Egypt and India. In 1994, however, the Pink Mealybug, and apparently the "serious pest strain", had reached the Western Hemisphere where it was identified first in Grenada and shortly thereafter in Trinidad. Although it may well have spread to Venezuela and elsewhere in South America, it appears to be restricted so far to the Eastern Caribbean, having island-hopped northward along the Lesser Antillas and is now present in Vieques and Culebra. Survey units of both USDA/APHIS and Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture are now requesting the public to provide information on possible Pink Mealybug infestations in the Island. Details on how to respond to the survey are in the Technical Contributions appended to this Newsletter.

According to all reports, the Pink Mealybug in the Lesser Antilles has become an extremely serious pest, attacking plants of economic importance (including heliconias and gingers) and disrupting regional trade and commerce through strict import-export quarantines. In order to combat this pest, a number of insecticides and bio-controls (wasps) are being tried as controls. So far, these are still at the experimental stage and a "sure cure" has yet to be identified. Therefore, it may be only a matter of time before *Maconellicoccus* is an unwanted guest in our patios and fincas.

The Newsletter thanks Judy Nelson for supplying original copy pertaining to Pink Mealybug and also to Ms. Sonia Colon of USDA/APHIS in San Juan for discussions, explanations and additional literature, which is appended as Technical Contributions.

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Cutting Propagation.

The herbaceous nature of plants belonging to the order Zingiberales generally precludes asexual propagation from stem cuttings or "esquejes". The key word, however, is "generally" -- thus admitting a few species into an exclusive club. The following species, all belonging to the family Costaceae, have been successfully propagated by Bob Lankford from stem cuttings:

<u>Species</u>	<u>Common Name</u>
<u>Costus barbatus</u>	Red Tower Ginger
<u>C. malortieanus</u>	Stepladder Ginger
<u>C. spicatus</u>	P. R. Native
<u>C. sp.</u>	"Red Rose" (Hort.)
<u>Monocostus uniflora</u>	Insulina
<u>Tapeinochilus ananassae</u>	Red Wax Ginger

The propagation techniques are fairly simple:

- (1) Select mature stems, cutting them diagonally into sections having at least two, preferably three nodes.
- (2) Mark each section with an "up" or "down" indicator -- up or down referring to the growth position of the stem.
- (3) Place sections in the down position in a vessel containing a solution of root hormone sufficient to cover the lower-most node.
- (4) Allow to soak for at least 1/2 day, or longer if attempting to start roots before potting.
- (5) Fill a container having drain holes with about 5-6 inches of moistened potting medium (eg: ProMix) and place "down end" of cut sections separately spaced into the medium with lower node covered.
- (6) Give pot a light top dressing of a balanced fertilizer.
- (7) Place container in a warm, brightly lighted location; water only enough to keep the potting medium moist, not soaked.
- (8) When sprouted cuttings have multiple-leaf growth, transplant individually to larger pots.

If other members of HSPR have had additional experience in this, or can add to the list of stem-propagated species, please give the information to Bob Lankford, P. O. Box 3162, Mayaguez, PR 00681, Tel: 833-8821.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Next Meeting of HSPR.

Our third meeting of 1998 is scheduled for 10:00 AM, September 13, the second Sunday of the month. The meeting venue will be at the home and finca of Dr. German Charron, near Corozal. He kindly has agreed to conduct a tour of part of his finca where he has extensive planting of his Heliconia collection. A road map is attached. His telephone No. is 859-5503.

The invited speaker for the meeting will be Dr. Duane Kolterman, a botanist with the UPR Department of Biology at Mayaguez. He will talk on C/Vs with emphasis on the Zingiberales, the botanical order of eight families including the Heliconiaceae. You may recall that Dr. Kolterman was to have presented this talk at our June meeting but had to cancel because of illness.

Telephone Committee.

Having only four meetings year, it is often too easy to forget a meeting date or to mark it down on your calendar. And then there is the problem of cancelled meetings, especially during hurricane season and for other emergencies as well. A telephone committee of three stalwart volunteers will handle calls -- to remind members a few days before a meeting, to cancel meetings and to inform you of the new meeting date. The volunteers and their calling areas are: (1) Jannette Crespo, Metro and northeast; (2) Joan Kershaw, north and west; (3) Martha Lankford, south and central. Many thanks to the three of them.

Membership Directory.

The new HSPR directory of members, their mailing addresses and telephone numbers has been compiled and is enclosed. The list includes all HSPR members in good standing as of September, 1998. As in any compilation, there may be errors or omissions. Please, announce any corrections at the September meeting.

Plant Sale and Interchange.

Sherry Ballester has accepted to coordinate the plant sale and interchange which is scheduled to be a part of our December meeting. Although Sherry has had considerable experience in this type of activity, she will need support of other key players to make this event successful and hopefully an annual activity at our December meetings. Sherry will provide more information at our next meeting and in the following Newsletter.

The Members' Forum.

As originally conceived, the Members' Forum is basically a "show and tell" operation. Time would be set aside at the end of meetings for any individual to share something of interest or concern with the group. It would also be an opportunity to ask questions, to get information about a plant, a technique or a problem. So far, this particular activity hasn't really gotten off the ground. The Forum still seems like a good idea, however, and members are encouraged to take advantage of this interesting and potentially rewarding program.

TECHNICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This section will be an occasional part of HSPR Newsletter. It is added as an appendix to this issue as an extension of the information on the Pink Mealybug Threat given in News Briefs above. HSPR members are encouraged to contribute material for this part of the Newsletter, bearing in mind that we must have the publisher's or author's permission to reprint copyrighted material.