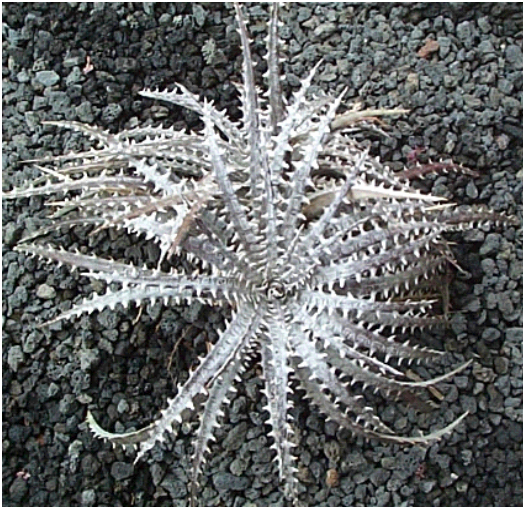


Sunset Succulent Society

Succulent of the Month June 2007 – *Succulent Bromeliads*

The *Bromeliads*, like *Cacti* are a New World family. Like the *Cacti* they have evolved to cover a range of environments, from the Coastal Mountains of Chile, to the plains of Argentina, to the Amazon, the dry scrub and Montane forests of Brazil, all of Central America and Mexico, the off-shore Islands, and even the temperature regions of Argentina and the United States.



Dyckia fosteriana

The *Bromeliad* Family is one of the monocots, along with *Agave* and *Aloe*, however it is a very distant relative of these more common succulents, and is more closely allied to the *Palms*, *Heliconia*, and the non-succulent monocots of the tropics. Most *Bromeliads* are not succulent. They come from tropical forests and require a steady source of water.

There are at least three regions where gradual climatic change forced some *Bromeliad* genera (and some species of other genera) to become succulent. The best known of the succulent genera are *Dyckia*, from Brazil and the surrounding countries, *Puya*, which

are mostly Andean plants, *Hechtia*, largely confined to Mexico, and the *Tillandsia*, which inhabit regions from Virginia to Argentina. There are some spectacular succulents in other genera as well.

Dyckia and *Hechtia* have similar cultural requirements, even though they are a hemisphere apart. Both like well draining soil. Most species can tolerate some cold, and light frosts are generally not a problem. A heavy frost will cause some tip damage, but is usually not fatal. They can take full sun when planted in the ground, but prefer some protection from the worst of the heat during the day. The roots are more sensitive to overheating than the leaves. There are dozens of species of *Dyckia*. *Hechtia* names need work; there are many unnamed species, and many species with more than one name. There are spectacular forms just waiting for cultivation.

A lesser-known genus with a significant number of succulent species is *Orthophytum*. This genus comes from Brazil, and the genus for the most part occupies a warm and humid environment. Many of the *Orthophytum* are spectacularly flocced with special cells (trichomes) that pull moisture directly out of the air. Bands of trichome rich and trichome poor regions on the leaves give these plants a spectacular coloring.

References:

- H. Jacobsen, **A Handbook of Succulent Plants**
- D. Benzing, **Bromeliaceae Profile of an Adaptive Radiation**

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