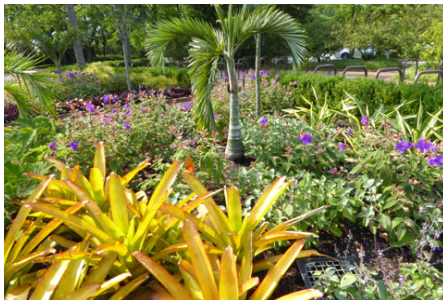


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Showcasing Bromeliads in the Summer Garden

Andrew Bunting



Not only do bromeliads continue to be popular in tropical parts of the country like Florida and parts of California, but they're being used more and more for summer displays in more northern climates.

Bromeliads in the landscape bring myriad color foliage types and they also add architectural forms to the garden. Neoregelias are stout rosettes of leaves. *Aechmea blanchetiana* has tall and arching leaves, while *Alcantarea odorata* has slender arching, silvery-grey leaves.

For the last several years, I've been enjoying and observing the use of bromeliads at Chanticleer, a public garden outside of Philadelphia. Dan Benarcik, horticulturist at Chanticleer, notes that "Alcantarea imperialis Rubra succeeds like nothing else. It has a huge presence in the garden or container. Also, it has no spines to deal with." (Most bromeliads have sharply serrated leaves or "spines," which can make planting or grooming a painful proposition!)

Bold and Colorful

In the summer of 2017 when I was at the Chicago Botanic Garden, we planned most of our seasonal display gardens inspired by the works of Brazilian garden designer Roberto Burle Marx, who was known for designs of bold and colorful foliage using tropical plants. We incorporated a wide range of bromeliads including *alcantarea*, *aechmea* and *neoregelia* to highlight our summer displays. In colder climates like Chicago, Philadelphia, etc., bromeliads can be planted in the garden when the last frost-free day passes and will last well into the fall.

One of the most versatile of all the bromeliad genera for use in containers, window boxes and accents in summer planting displays is neoregelia. Like most other bromeliads, *neoregelia* is an epiphyte in its native habitats in the rainforests of South America. In the garden, they form a dense rosette of leaves with each leaf forming a "cup" near the stem to catch rain and moisture. Many cultivars will grow in part sun to sun with the intensity of the foliage color becoming often more pronounced in full sun, but there are also cultivars that thrive better and have best coloration in partially shaded conditions.



Pictured clockwise from top, left:

Alcantarea odorata at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Aechmea Hawaii

Neoregelia Guacamole

Alcantarea imperialis at Chanticleer in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

Neoregelia Fireball

Neoregelia Fireball and Super Fireball have deep red and burgundy-red foliage, respectively, which intensifies in full sun. Richard Hartlage, owner of Land Morphology, a landscape architecture firm in Seattle, also states, "Fireball is my favorite neoregelia. It is bright red in the sun and green in the shade."

Elwood is slightly larger in stature and the leaves are longer. The shiny burgundy leaves fade to green at the tips and have slight flecks of green. Guacamole reaches 9-in. tall and has intermittent striping and blotching of lime green and burgundy, and thrives best in partial sun. But there are dozens of other cultivars with myriad yellows, pinks, reds, etc. in the variegation of the leaves.

Bigger Options in Bromeliads

For a larger stature presence in the garden, I would recommend aechmea. The leaves are long at 36-in. and are finely serrated. In full sun they'll be a bright

yellow-orange. One example that's available is Hawaii. Blue Tango is as much grown for its flowers as it is for its foliage. Rising above the green foliage to 40 in. is a cherry-pink flower stalk covered in dozens of tubular, iridescent blue flowers that are truly stunning. In any region of the country, flowering bromeliads will attract hummingbirds.

Flowering time, in general, with bromeliads will vary. Some wholesale companies like Bullis Bromeliads (wholesale) can give them an ethylene treatment that will trigger flowering and you can ask for a specific bloom time. Hacienda is shorter in habit, reaching 20 in., and has beautiful wine-red foliage. When it flowers, the flowering stalks are orange with contrasting yellow flowers. Pinot Noir reaches 36 in. and is a deep burgundy-purple with reddish stems and yellow flowers. Hawaii, Pinot Noir and Hacienda will color best in full sun. Blue Tango can grow in full sun, but can also thrive in partial shade.

Making a Statement

For stature and statement in the garden, I love to use alcantarea. *Alcantarea imperialis* Malbec has very broad arching leaves that are burgundy-red on the underside and glossing green on the surface. They make a bold specimen in a container, but can be planted in the ground for an equal effect. At Chanticleer, *alcantarea* is saved for the winter and essentially treated like a houseplant. By saving them each year, the specimens get larger and larger, eventually reaching at least 4- to 5-ft. tall with equal spread.

Alcantarea odorata has much more narrow leaves that beautifully arch at the tip. The foliage appears to be dusted with a silver-white powder. Reaching 32-in. tall, it's perfect for a container or planting in a garden bed. Stunning

combinations can be accomplished with simply pairing this plant with a black foliage elephant ear like Coal Miner, Black Magic or Black Coral.

For great accents in a small container, or even grown as a small specimen in a container, I recommend cryptanthus. Cryptanthus, like the many of the neoregelias, only reaches 6-in. tall. Black Magic has rosettes of relatively flat foliage that's black-green with zig-zag patterns of horizontal white striping. Pink Starlite has slightly arching leaves with an outer edge of bubblegum pink fading to light pink to forest green and with a black-green in the center.

At the end of the summer all of these can be brought inside from the garden and treated as a houseplant and then used the subsequent year in the garden. Most listed here will benefit from high humidity conditions in the house.

There undoubtedly is a bromeliad to fill every gardening niche, whether it be full sun or full shade, or if the needs are large or small. If you've never grown them, start with one and soon (I guarantee) you'll be hooked on the ornamental breadth and depth of this group. **GP**

Andrew Bunting is the Vice President of Horticulture for the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, which uses horticulture to advance the health and well-being of the Greater Philadelphia region. Andrew has decades of horticultural experience, ranging from his tenures at public gardens in the U. S. and abroad, as well as a published author, gardening expert and sought-after presenter. To learn more about PHS or to become a member and support greening initiatives in over 250 neighborhoods, visit PHSONline.org.