

# THE ROMANCE OF *bromeliads*

BY RAMONA D'VIOLA



“I know how to make colors,” claims the biochemist turned botanist. “We have a couple of stud plants that produce the purest white flowers to the richest, deepest reds.” And sometimes truly comic combinations—like a pink and green horizontally striped plant that looks as if it came right out of the circus.

Found primarily in the rain forests, bromeliads are one of the planet’s most fascinating flora. Often referred to as the “other orchid,” the two epiphytes share an ability to improve air quality, making them doubly attractive as interior landscaping. In their native environs, bromeliads derive their moisture from the air, not their host, scrubbing the air of particulates and gases before releasing clean oxygen back into the environment.

For sheer variety of color, shape and texture, bromeliads in the wild are unsurpassed—and with the likes of a paperclip-wielding Kent, we’re sure to see more of the bizarre and beautiful plants. When asked how he sterilizes the tool between pollinations, Kent drags the un-twisted paperclip across his sleeve a couple of times then holds it up once again for my inspection. “Clean as a whistle,” he quips with an impish grin. So much for science!

The family-run business currently holds more than two dozen patents on hybrid varieties. Although the nursery is not open to the public, Kent’s bromeliads are available at fine garden centers in California. ❖



“After 25 years, I’ve finally discovered the perfect tool for pollinating bromeliads,” proclaims Jeffrey Kent of Kent’s Bromeliad Nursery in Vista. He extends an unfolded, vinyl-coated paper clip for closer inspection. Its bright red tip is

