Aechmea blanchetiana: Bromeliad[1]

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Introduction

The attractive orange foliage with red tips of this easy-care bromeliad is a perfect background for the brilliant, spring-time flower stalk, which emerges from the tight center rosette of leaves. The flower stalk is composed of a cluster of red and yellow showy bracts. It is the long-lasting bracts that are most noticeable. They can be used as cut flowers indoors for a period of weeks.

Figure 1. Flower—*Aechmea blanchetiana*: bromeliad.
Credits: Edward F. Gilman, UF/IFAS

General Information

Scientific name: *Aechmea blanchetiana*
Pronunciation: eek-MEE-uh blan-ket-ee-AY-nuh
Common name(s): bromeliad
Family: *Bromeliaceae*
Plant type: perennial; herbaceous
USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Figure 2)
Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round
Origin: not native to North America
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Uses: mass planting; container or above-ground planter; ground cover; suitable for growing indoors
Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 4 feet
Spread: 1 to 2 feet
Plant habit: vase shape
Plant density: open
Growth rate: slow
Texture: coarse

1. This document is FPS14, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Revised November 2017. Visit the EDIS website at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Reviewed: 06/2022

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: basal rosette
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: spiny
Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)
Leaf venation: parallel
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 18 to 36 inches
Leaf color: orange
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: pink; salmon
Flower characteristic: spring flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: no fruit
Fruit length: no fruit
Fruit cover: no fruit
Fruit color: not applicable
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: usually with one stem/trunk
Current year stem/twig color: not applicable
Current year stem/twig thickness: not applicable

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: slightly alkaline; clay; sand; acidic; loam
Drought tolerance: high
Soil salt tolerance: poor
Plant spacing: 18 to 24 inches

Other

Roots: not applicable
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: no serious pests are normally seen on the plant

Use and Management

Growing best in partial shade in moisture-retentive but well-drained soil, this bromeliad makes a handsome ground cover or container plant. Place individual plants about 18 to 24 inches apart for an effective ground cover. A ground cover or mass planting in front of a green-foliaged shrub grouping that branches to the ground makes a nice, bright accent for a partially shaded spot. It can also be successfully grown epiphytically, or without soil, with moss around its roots. Wire it to the branches of rough-barked trees where its cupped rosette will catch needed water.

Propagation is by division of the offsets or by seed.

Design Considerations

The bold form and coarse texture of the bromeliad make it perfect for containers and highly visible spaces in the landscape. Use with plants that are softer with small foliage and mounding or spreading forms. Medium and dark green foliage will highlight the orange and red of the bromeliad. Pair with plants that have more texture in the foliage to contrast with the smooth leaves of the bromeliad. Use plants with no flowers or small to medium flowers with cool bright colors to contrast with the bright red and orange. Complementary colors include cool colors such as purples and blues. Use large masses of companion plants around the base or in front of the bromeliads when they are planted in a mass.

Pests and Diseases

Root rot is a problem if the soil is kept too moist. No irrigation is needed to maintain the plants once they are established.

Other problems include scale and mosquitoes, which may breed in the trapped water in the leaves.