

Aechmea distichantha¹

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Introduction

The attractive green foliage of this easy-care, durable bromeliad is a perfect background for the brilliant, springtime flower stalk that emerges from the tight center rosette of leaves (Figure 1). The flower stalk is composed of a cluster of red, showy bracts lasting several months. It is the long-lasting bracts that are most noticeable and stand about 2 feet off the ground. They are very striking in full bloom.

General Information

Scientific name: *Aechmea distichantha*

Pronunciation: eek-MEE-uh
diss-stick-KANTH-uh

Common name(s): bromeliad

Family: *Bromeliaceae*

Plant type: perennial; herbaceous

USDA hardiness zones: 10B through 11 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: year round



Figure 1. Bromeliad.

Origin: not native to North America

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

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: vase shape

Plant density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

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: blue or blue-green

Fall color: no fall color change

Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red

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, tall 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. Bromeliads are tough plants needing little care once they become established.

Propagation is by division of the offsets or by seed.

Pests and Diseases

Problems include scale and mosquitoes, which may breed in the trapped water in the leaves. Root rot is a problem if the soil is kept too moist. No irrigation is needed once the plant is well established.