Dyckia

This popular genus of bromeliads is found in many collections. Although not necessarily succulent, these plants are also one of the more popular in succulent shows. This summary is edited from an article presented by the Houston Bromeliad Society. They begin the article with "Those Dyckias are tough plants!"

"Dyckia is one of the genera in the subfamily Pitcairnioideae. This subfamily contains some of the most primitive Bromeliad species. Most Pitcairnioideae genera are saxicolous (living on or around rocks) or terrestrial (growing in the ground), with Dyckias into both categories (e.g. D. saxicola), although most are strictly terrestrial and all do well when grown as strict terrestrials. The majority of the approximately 120 different species of Dyckia are native to central Brazil, with some being found in Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia. Most are found growing among rocks in warm sunny areas ranging in altitude from sea level to 2000 meters.

"The genus was introduced into Europe during the nineteenth century, and was named for Prince von Salm-Dyck, an early expert on succulents. Although Dyckias have no internal water storage tissue like true succulents, they are xerographic and survive long periods without water by going dormant. Their rosette of thick succulent leaves will eventually wilt, but recovery is rapid when watering is resumed. These plants are tough! They will withstand more neglect than almost any other commonly cultivated plant and still pup and bloom every year. Their only demand is a little water and a lot of sunshine. In the spring they bear multiple red, yellow or orange flowers on a thin stalk that emerges from the side of the plant. The stalk length can range from about 10 centimeters for a small species like *D. choristaminea* to more than 2 meters for *D. maritima*.

Dyckia dawsonii photo by Chanin Thorut

"Although the flowers aren't large, bees, wasps and hummingbirds find them attractive. The plants themselves come in a range of colors (green, rose, maroon, tan, or silver), and a variety of leaf shapes (long and thin, short and fat, deeply lobed, or almost smooth). In an outdoor setting with considerable sunshine, these plants may be a welcome addition to your garden." (At left is *D. dawsonii*, a popular Dyckia and a good example of long, thin, maroon leaves. At right is *D. playtphylla*, another popular Dyckia and a good example of a wide, green leaf.)

"For the most part, Dyckias are not demanding in their culture. Generally I have found the following conditions work well:

> "Light: They like full sunlight. 5000 foot-candles, 50% shade, is probably the least amount of sun that they can have and still flourish.
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> "Temperature: They prefer temperatures in the range of 40-90 degrees Fahrenheit, but they will withstand much lower and higher temperatures. Most species will not be harmed by freezing weather if they are planted in the ground and given minimal protection.
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> "Fertilizer: Use full a dilute fertilizer solution (¼ strength or less) with every watering spring through fall, but eliminate fertilizer during cold weather. When plants are actively growing in strong light, it is hard to over fertilize an established plant, but they don't appear to suffer if they are not fertilized, they just grow more slowly.
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> "Water: Although they will tolerate drought, they thrive on frequent watering while actively growing, however keep plants on the dry side during cold weather or during periods of reduced light. In the summer time they tend to dry out rapidly; it is helpful to keep them in a shallow container of water.

(Editors comment: We originally watered our Dyckias during the summer on a succulent plant schedule but found that a more frequent timetable produced happier plants.)

"Medium: (An organic based mix used for succulents is usually best.) A mix similar to what would be used for a Cryptanthus or a Hectia would be appropriate.

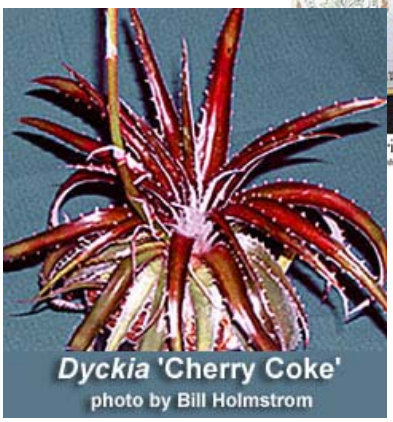
"Containers: Dyckias probably do best when they are grown in the ground. Their ability to take temperatures in the 15-20 degree range makes them one of the best Bromeliads to use for landscaping in (cooler areas.) They should be able to take all but our most severe winter weather with only minimal protection. If you do choose to grow them in pots, use one that will accommodate the plant's large root system. This is one plant that appreciates a pot that is about as wide as or wider than the plant itself. But WARNING: usually the larger the pot and the more the fertilizer the bigger the plant.

"Propagation: Most Dyckia species have leaves armed with sharp spikes that make working with the plants painful. It is often difficult to separate pups from the mother plant. It is helpful to remove the plant from its pot and try to work on it from the bottom. You want to bring out the heavy equipment when dealing with your Dyckia collection. Leather gloves, a sturdy knife, a small saw, and, in extreme cases, a hatchet could all come in handy when it is time to separate and repot large clumps of plants. When you separate a pup, try to preserve as much of its root system as you can. If it has no roots, treat its base with rooting hormone before potting. In either case pot the plant in a fairly small pot using a well drained mix, and leave it there until the plant has a chance to establish itself. Most pups are slow to root and start growing, but when the plants root system fills the pot, move the plant into a larger pot using a heavier mix.

"If you want to try your hand at hybridizing, dyckias are good candidates. You need to remove any blooms that you don't pollinate, and make sure that the plant is in a protected location since the birds and insects will be more than willing to give you a hand. (At right is a *Dyckia platyphylla x fosteriana*, an example of crossing two very different leaf types.). When the pods are ripe, collect the seed and sow them in a well drained sterile mix. As the plants grow move them into increasingly larger pots. Grown from seed plants will usually take 3 or more years to bloom.

"Problems: Other than an occasional slug stopping by for a midnight snack, or a case of brown scale, or snails eating the delicate bloom stalks, insects don't appear to bother Dyckias much. The most common disease problem is rotting off because it was over watered during the winter.

"Almost all species and hybrids grow well with little care. Some of the more popular species are:
Dyckia brevifolia ("Yellow glow")
D. choristaminea
D. fosteriana
D. marnier-lapostollei
D. platyphylla
"Some of the more popular hybrids are:
Dyckia 'Brittle Star' (at right)
D. 'Cherry Coke' (below center)
D. 'Naked Lady' (below left)
D. 'Red Devil'"



Dyckias

*This is a portion of an article by **Kathy Dorr** was printed in the March 2004 issue of the Newsletter of the Bromeliad Society of San Francisco and in the April 1994 North County Bromeliad Society newsletter. It originally appeared in the Long Beach-Lakewood Bromeliad Study Group newsletter (date unknown.).*

Dyckia brevifolia painting by Domingos Fossari

Dyckias are small to large plants with a thick root stem. The stiff, spiny leaves narrow to a point. The inflorescence rises on a long stem, usually from the side of the plant rather than from the center. The inflorescence may be a single spike, or it may be branched.

The flowers, in most cases, are perfect with both male and female parts; however, in some rare instances there are some that are either "male" or "female" plants. The flowers are comparatively small and range in color from yellow to red. The sepals overlap and are much shorter than the petals in most instances. The petals also overlap and are attached to the filament tube. The stamens extend beyond the petals of the flowers and the ovary is superior. (At left is a drawing of *D. brevifolia* in flower.)

The seed capsules are short and fat. They contain many seeds. Each seed has a single thin extension attached. These plants are native to Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Bolivia.

There are about a hundred species. If you are limited to a very few, the following suggestions are made:

Dyckia fosteriana var. *fosteriana* – this small (5-6 inches in diameter) Dyckia forms a beautiful silver, compact cluster of leaves, arising basally from a crown. These narrow (5/16") sharp pointed leaves arch and recurved again, giving a powder puff appearance. The silver with reddish brown tipped spines along the edge of the leaves are very prominent. The flower spike rises 15-16 inches above the plant (very seldom) and produces bell-shaped, bright orange flowers all around the stem. The inflorescence is strikingly similar to most dyckias.

Dyckia fosteriana from Emboque Parana photo by C Gastaldi

Dyckia fosteriana var. *robustior* is like the above described, only more so. It is larger, reaching as much as 7-8 inches in diameter. It is not as readily available as Dyckia fosteriana var. fosteriana but is worth searching for.

Dyckia marnier-lapostellei – it would be difficult to aggrandize the beauty of this Dyckia. The leaves are approximately one inch wide (or more) and eight inches long. They have a stiff succulent appearance. They appear silver colored and have very prominent spines which mostly hook toward the base of the plant rather than toward the tips of the leaves. Although these spines appear vicious, they are actually rather soft and this plants is one of the easiest to handle of all the dyckias. The flower spike is tall and has few flowers. (ED note: plant often looks whiter than that shown.)

Dyckia marnier-lapostellei
15th World Bromeliad Conference, St. Petersburg, Florida, May 13 - 19, 2002
Shown by Tom Wolfe

Dyckia platyphylla is a gorgeous dark green, shiny succulent appearing plant that is approximately 8-10 inches in diameter. The leaves are approximately an inch and a half wide at the base and taper to a very sharp point. They are edged with spines that appear almost white which curve toward the tip of the leaf. The inflorescence is usually one single stem with many flowers, though the flowers are not close together. (see page 4 where this plant is used as an example of a wide leaf Dyckia.)

There are many Dyckias to choose from, but these are my top choices.

My Favorite Brom – Dyckia

Many of you may have seen the Dyckia displays that **Jim Hanna** has shown. Jim is a succulent grower who has developed a collection of outstanding Dyckia. This master grower presents a table of Dyckia, each plant better than the last. If you ever get a chance to see this display, take it!

When asked for a favorite Dyckia, Jim did not hesitate – it is Dyckia "Keswick." He prefers this plant because of both the plants appearance and its growth habit:

Appearance: This Bill Baker hybrid combines a very dark plant body with contrasting white teeth to give a startling and appealing appearance.

Growth Habit: This plant stays relatively small and easy to handle. Over time, it will grow into a mass as shown in the picture at right but each plant can remain in the same pot for years.

Dyckia 'Keswick' photo by Chris Nguyen

Jim credits Dyckia 'Brittle Star' as one parent of D. 'Keswick'. We can see why he likes this plant!

Joe Wujcik

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Editorial: Why do you need a saw?

Under propagation above, the writer mentions that a small saw and hatchet are good tools to have for separating Dyckias. Why are they needed? Dyckias tend to form very thick and interconnected root systems that are impenetrable without help. One of the greatest demonstrations your editors ever saw at a SVBS meeting was given by Robert Kopfstein where he separated a clump of Dyckia and a saw was the only way to divide the plants. It was very educational. From that day forward, I have been much less afraid of handling these highly armored plants when I am properly equipped.

These articles originally appeared together in the July 2011 Pup Talk, the newsletter of the Saddleback Bromeliad Society.

ADVENTURES IN REPOTTING with Joe & Carol

When most of us think of Dyckia, we picture an upright, well armored rosette with a very strong root system that will be a "bear" to repot. An example might be the *Dyckia fosteriana* pictured at right. This popular plant is the basis of several popular cultivars such as *Dyckia* 'Brittle Star.'

DYCKIA ESTEVESII

Dyckia fosteriana from Emboque Parana photo by C Gastaldi

As always, there are exceptions to this appearance rule. One such exception is *Dyckia estevesii*. Instead of the strong, rosette pictured at right, this fan shaped Dyckia grows on its side almost horizontally once pups appear. This special plant is found only in the vicinity of Goias, Brazil. It was named for its discoverer, Eddie Estavis Pereira by Rauh. As frequently found in rarer plants, there is not a lot of information on this plant in our books. However the internet is full of conflicting information. For example, we found a couple of mentions that this plant is sterile and will not bloom. However, other articles have pictures of flowers (like that taken by George Allaria at right.)

We obtained our plant from a friend who said that we would find the growth habit of the plant interesting. He was very right.

We can say this, the horizontal shape of this plant has some advantages in handling for repotting but, like most Dyckia, this plant presents a mass of strong roots and is well armored for protection. Self protection is suggested for those repotting it.

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ON THE WEB: **If you love Dyckias, you will want to visit retired dentist Constantino Gastaldi's dyckiabrazil.blogspot.com, which includes wonderful color photos as well as commentary. His forum at dyckiabrazil.com is also well worth a visit. There are LOTS of Dyckias. *Thanks to editor Nels Christianson of Sunset Succulent Society for this information.***