

# *The Codiaeum Connection*

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1

March 2005

## *A Croton Society Tribute to Gus Jimenez*



### ***A message to the members:***

Happy Spring to all of our Florida members! This is the time when all of your crotons are popping with new growth. Time to get out the Nutricote and Muracid and feed your favorites. We will be having meetings on both coasts on April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 12 noon. We are asking the membership to come with ideas and implementation strategies to fulfill our purpose.

This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of one of the Society's founders, Gus Jimenez. Gus pioneered and led the Society in tackling the purpose of finding, propagating and distributing the plant *Codiaeum Variegatum*. On the cover, Nita and J.R. Renfroe's Gus Jimenez is shown in different stages of growth.

By now, you should have received your 2005 Ralph Davis' Collection Calendar. Having only twelve months in a year, we were not able to show many of the varieties that were hybridized by Davis. In this newsletter, there are additional Davis Crotons.

In our next newsletter, we will be highlighting Crotons in Australia. We will need input from our friends in Australia to give an overall view of the Crotons that are native to Australia. Please send your pictures and or articles to the Society's address or email [croton1@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:croton1@tampabay.rr.com).

Don't miss the Croton article in the March issue of Sarasota Magazine. It is full of Croton history, goals and accomplishments of the Croton Society. Contributing quotes from the Reasoner Bros. (Harry) and several members of the Society made this article a must read. There is now talk of creating a Croton Repository at Selby Gardens in Sarasota.

**Increase  
Your  
Collection!**

**Don't miss the Croton Society's**

## **SPRING FLING**

**Saturday, April 9th, 10-4**

**Sunday, April 10th, 10-3**

**University of South Florida Botanical Gardens, Tampa Campus**

**Volunteer  
To Help!**

#### **Directions:**

**From I-275:** Exit Fowler Avenue, head east to Bruce B. Downs Blvd. / 30th Street and turn left. Go north one block to Pine Drive (1st light) and turn right. Go east one block to the first traffic light and turn left. Go one block to Alumni Drive. The gardens entrance is on the left, parking is across the street.

**From I-75:** Exit Fowler Avenue. Head west to Bruce B. Downs Blvd. / 30th Street and turn right. Go one block north to Pine Drive (1st light) and turn right. Go east one block to the first traffic light and turn left. Go one block to Alumni Drive. The gardens entrance is on the left, parking is across the street.

***Plant Sale : Early Admission for Society Member Volunteers***

***\*\*Volunteers are needed for Friday through Sunday—Call 813-968-9689 (Connie)\*\****

***E-Mail: [Choerstg@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:Choerstg@tampabay.rr.com) and [Croton1@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:Croton1@tampabay.rr.com)***



# THE BEST CROTON COLLECTION

## ON THE EARTH?

by Perry Edge



According to Dr. B. Frank Brown, world traveler and *Codiaeum* expert, the best Croton collection on the planet is not in any botanical garden, nor is it hidden away in the estate of a wealthy collector.

Instead, it can be found at an ordinary home on a quiet street in a small community near Ft. Lauderdale. John Bender owns the collection, which Dr. Brown calls “the best collection of outstanding Crotons of *anybody*.” Period.

Bender’s collection is legendary among Croton fanciers, and it is no wonder that he has earned the coveted title of honorary member of The Croton Society.

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His story begins during the hard times of the Great Depression of the 1930’s. His family lost their farm in Michigan, forcing a relocation to Florida. First a carpenter and later a general contractor, Bender inherited a Croton collection when he moved into his first home. Later on, he wandered into a public library and found



and discovered the first book on Crotons written by Dr. Brown. Bender was intrigued, and he ordered the book from the author. They later met, which led to a friendship between the two which has spanned four decades.

After moving into his present home, Bender’s collecting began in earnest. He re-established the old, original crotons of the great hybridizers of the 20’s and 30’s, plus many more. He augmented his aggregation with his own hybrids, until the collection took on mythical proportions

until the collection took on legendary proportions.

The first clue that something special lies on the Bender property is a spectacular swath of Cronstadts across the front of his home, punctuated by a solitary Candy Cane. Two long groupings run the length of his front yard along the property line, and it is here that the visitor begins to experience *sensory overload*. The massing of Crotons of every type and color is almost more than the eye and brain can comprehend.



hend. Then there is the back yard, where towering Crotons crowd the paths, which wind around a large shade house. Inside, numerous exotic ferns hang like emerald jewels, a reminder that Bender also had an affinity for those plants as well. Propagated Crotons in containers are tucked everywhere, and aluminum foil-wrapped air layers festoon plants like Christmas ornaments. (He favors air layers over cuttings).

Bender is reluctant to name any favorite Crotons, but it is obvious that he favors Fishbone, as it is everywhere in his yard. "It's one of the most consistent Crotons", he explains. "Every leaf is the same."



Bender also named General McArthur and Sybil Griffin as Crotons he admires, and Eleanor Fisher (named after his late wife) is his favorite hybrid.

Bender is well known for his sense of humor. He once wrote an article for *The Codiaeum Connection* in which he revealed "Bender's foolproof method for removing Croton stains." It involved using a pair of scissors, with which the offending stain is carefully cut out of the fabric! Another *tour de farce* occurred when he was speaking to a fern society, and touted a "totally organic, all natural insect control." He then released a Gecko into the crowd, much to the consternation of the women in attendance!



An interesting footnote concerns the Croton which bears his name (below). It is not Bender's own creation. It was an unnamed Croton, already out in the community, origin unknown, which Dr. Brown named in honor of his friend.



Bender estimates that he has "maybe 400" varieties of Crotons, of which perhaps 250 are named. "I've enjoyed playing with them. I've always liked to grow," he says. Although almost anyone who sees his collection would be inspired to go on a collecting frenzy, Bender's advice rings true: "Don't try to get them all." His true disciples realize that after all, you can't duplicate "the most outstanding Croton collection in the world." "John Bender is head and shoulders above the rest," according to Dr. Brown. And that says it all. ☀



# Missed, but Not Forgotten

By Dr. Ron Parlett

It seems like yesterday, when Gus Jimenez re-entered my life. Several years earlier I was an assistant principal in a South Tampa junior high school. During this time, my interest in plants was evident in the plantings around the school and a plant farm I had developed to serve as a positive/or alternative discipline at the school. I taught ornamental horticulture to youngsters that had misbehaved at the school. In the process of pulling weeds and potting plants a genuine interest developed with many of these students. The plants were used to landscape the school and sold to local citizens. It was through these plantings Gus entered the picture. Gus loved the huge plumeria that lined the library. When he saw them he wanted a cutting. The reason Gus was at the school in the first place was the fact that he was the Supervisor of Secondary Social Studies, a position he held for many years, and was on a regular visit to see his Social Study teachers at the school.

We were fast friends because we shared an interest in tropical plants. The funny thing was we never spoke of crotons. Some years had passed and a picture of me and my huge croton collection 60 (what a joke) at that time was in the Tampa Tribune. Since there was no Croton Society, croton lovers and collectors never knew others had collections as well. After the article appeared, I started getting calls from people all over the area. One of those callers was Gus Jimenez. Gus told me of his collection and that of his sons which was probably twice the size of mine. Gus was a member of the Ybor City Historical Society and through these connection helped to organize what is now known as the "Croton Fiesta", this was a display of at least 134 varieties that were brought by approximately 5 people, mostly Gus and his son. Hundreds of people attended.

There still was not a Croton Society, but because of this display, it became obvious that there was tremendous interest in crotons. The following January (1998) a charter group of people founded the Croton Society. Gus served as the first ever vice president. Gus supported the society for several years. During this time his health began to deteriorate to the point that he was unable to participate. Gus was a staunch supporter of saving croton varieties from extinction; his dream was a croton repository in various parts of the state for this purpose. I am glad to say his dream is alive and well in several parts of the state.

In late 2004, Gus lost his battle with his illness and passed away. It is hard to say if the Croton Society would have ever been founded without his influence, encouragement and support. I have forgotten the procedure and the qualifications of how the Croton Society selects its Honorary Members but I feel that Gus's induction needs to be considered. Many of you may have wondered how in the world did the Croton Society ever began in Tampa of all places. Well now you know. Tampa is only the origin, with approximately 200 members from all over the state, nation and the world there are no boundaries or headquarters for the society to operate. The only thing that is needed, are individuals that are willing to step up like Gus did, and take the reins and direct the society under the framework in which it was founded. Gus, we truly miss you!

Croton Society Founder Gus Jimenez, with members John Bender and Keith Hanks during 1st Croton Fiesta at Ybor City Historical Museum 1999.



### **Upcoming Meetings- April 2, 2005**

East coast members are invited to Brian Allen's home for a Croton Society meeting. The Date is April 2, 2005 @ 12:00 noon. All members wishing to attend, please RSVP no later than Saturday, March 26, 2005.. Please call him @ 954-553-5072. The address is: 5610 Pine Tree Road, Coral Springs, FL 33067. Please contact Brian for directions or you can go to the internet. West coast members are also welcome to attend

West coast members, the Croton Society will also be meeting on Saturday, April 2, 2005 at the Tampa USF Botanical Gardens from 12:00 noon to 13:30. (see directions on page 2 of this newsletter). Discussion will be on the upcoming Croton Society Spring plant sale at USF April 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and any other items of interest members may have. Members are encouraged to bring any new ideas to the table. Please bring Crotons for our auction. East coast members are also welcome to attend.

### **Newsletter Articles:**

You are the membership and as such, we need your talents to have a successful society. Without your articles, we can not continue to produce and print newsletters. Please send your articles to The Croton Society, PO Box 24892, Tampa, FL 33623-4892.

Articles are needed for future additions of the Croton Society Newsletter. We try to publish newsletters each quarter. In order to include any new articles in newsletters, we need them by the following dates:

March Newsletter, articles are needed by February 10th

June Newsletter, articles are needed by May 10th

September Newsletter, articles are needed by August 10th

December Newsletter, articles are needed by November 10th

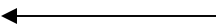
### **Attention All Members:**

Members may want to go out and purchase a copy of the March addition of the "Sarasota Magazine". There is a wonderful 3 page article about Crotons written by Mary Lou Smart. You can find this magazine at Borders books and Walden books. Not all book stores carry this magazine, so you should call before heading out.

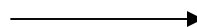
### **Pruning Winter Damaged Croton (Sticks)**



Does your Croton look like this?  
**Got Sticks??!!**  
**Don't dig it up! It is NOT dead!!**



Remove the dead leaves and fertilize with a good acidic fertilizer. At each node, you will have a new head or set of leaves that will give you back your beautiful Croton specimen. In a few weeks, your croton will look like this





Davis 3

# Additional Ralph Davis

## Plant Collections



Davis Seedling



Charlemagne



DAVIS SPORT