

The Codiaeum Connection

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2

September 2005

A Croton Society Tribute to Robert Halgrim



Robert (Bob) Halgrim

Cornelius Halgrim



Sweet Marie



A message to the members:

At our last meeting on April 2, 2005, the decision was made to increase membership dues effective February 1, 2006 to \$25.00 per year for US members and \$35.00 for International members. As a small non-profit club, our only form of funds is generated from the membership dues and the marginal 10% or 20% we collect from the vendors at our sales. We are not able to continue printing a quarterly newsletter and the yearly calendars if we keep the dues at \$15.00 per year. We were fortunate to be able to have kept the dues at the \$15.00 rate since 1999. As you all know, costs continue to increase and we must pass these on to our membership. The calendars alone retail for \$20.00, and we have absorbed the additional costs over the past years and are unable to continue doing so.

We would also like to increase the color in our newsletters. I'm sure everyone enjoyed the March 2005 issue which included some of this extra color. To help offset the cost of mailing and supplies, those members who have email, will receive an electronic copy in a PDF format which everyone should be able to view. If you do not have an Adobe reader, you can download it for free at www.adobe.com.

Anyone interested in taking on the responsibility to producing our quarterly newsletter is encouraged to contact us as soon as you can. This opportunity to promote your creative talents and explore areas of personal growth are life changing. Please contact Connie Hoerstgen @ 813-968-9689, if you are interested.

Remember, this is your society and we need your help for it to be successful and to continue. Thank you!

Connie Hoerstgen, Treasurer, Croton Society Inc.



DON'T MISS THE CROTON SOCIETY'S 8TH ANNUAL CROTON FIESTA

SATURDAY, October 8th, 10-4

Sunday, October 9th, 10-3

University of South Florida Botanical Gardens, Tampa Campus

Admission is \$3.00 for non-volunteers



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)◄◄

Remembering Robert Halgrim

Anyone who becomes interested in Crotons, soon learns some valid truisms about them:

1. Croton stains are permanent
2. Crotons are generally misunderstood from a cultural standpoint, as well as from a historical viewpoint.

There are very few plants that Floridians can lay claim to. Committed nurserymen and hobbyists developed the majority of the showy varieties in Central and South Florida.

Since you are a devoted Croton grower, you might want to delve into their history. Victor Lemoine, William Craig and F. M. Dreer, to name a few, are some of European and Northern United States hybridizer. Here in Florida, some of the hybridizers were the Reasoners, Aubrey Christian, Henry Coppinger, Ralph Davis and Charles Rutherford.

With the recent passing of Mr. Halgrim, the bridge to our Croton past is virtually gone.



Freckles

Mr. Halgrim's memory will live on as he produced a great many plants and included many rescued seedlings grown and named by him. Mr. Halgrim was friends with Mr. Coppinger who produced some classic Florida crotons such as Johanna Coppinger, Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt and Miami Beauty, all from one batch of seeds. Mr. Halgrim befriended Mr. Henry Coppinger when Mr. Coppinger's car broke down in Ft. Myers. Mr. Halgrim helped him and insisted that an Edison home vehicle tow him back to Miami. Mr. Coppinger never forgot this, thus Mr. Halgrim was able to obtain most of Mr. Coppinger's newest and best introductions

When Mr. Coppinger passed away, his wife gave Mr. Halgrim Coppinger's last seedling crop. Namely, from that



Nellie Halgrim

Although I did not get to know Mr. Halgrim until after his health declined, he was very clear on his knowledge of crotons. His stories about Florida crotons in the early days and the people that produced them were thus passed on to me and also to any other croton lovers that had the honor to meet him and hear his first-hand recollections of croton history. Many growers, myself included, have had many "unknown" plants identified by Mr. Halgrim. It was really our last hope to garner the history of crotons. As the years go by, identification of plants have become of major importance. Descriptions in books helps, however, first hand knowledge is always the best.

Years ago, Dr. Frank Brown, told me that Southwest Florida was a good place to move to if I ever had the opportunity. It has the right climate and soil for Crotons. Also, and more importantly, Mr. Halgrim was in Fort Myers. Dr. Brown said, "He has the finest collection of crotons and a vast knowledge of the plants".

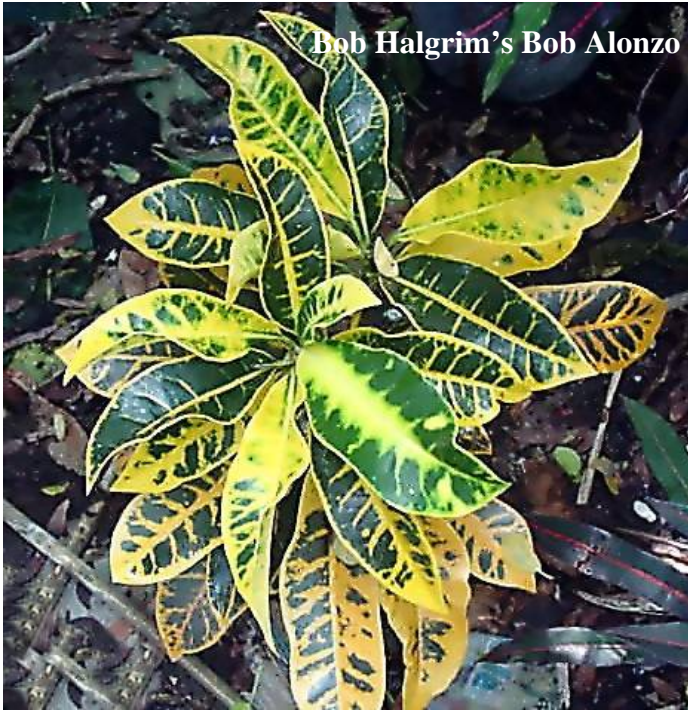


Tommy Halgrim

batch of seedlings came: Thomas Edison, Mrs. Edison, and White Tapestry.

Mr. Halgrim's seedlings were the last full range of crotons, colors, shapes and textures from Tommy Halgrim, a very tight growing spiral leaf to Nellie Halgrim named after his mother, a small growing brilliant yellow oak leaf with no two leaves alike. Each plant was distinctive and cannot be mistaken for any other croton grower's seedling.

Remembering Robert Halgrim (continued)



One of his unique seedlings, Cornelius Halgrim, is a thick textured hot pink pointed leaf that is about 18 inches long and slow growing. His 'Freckles', is heavily dusted with brilliant rose pink spots aptly well named. I was honored to have one of his seedlings named after me. It is dark green with a golden yellow edge to the leaf. Other Halgrim seedlings are Ben Alexander, Sheet Jones, Florida Sunset, Her Highness, John Halgrim Jr., Nocatee and Sweet Marie.



Mr. Halgrim's best gift to the croton world was his collection of old and fine varieties, most of which were growing at the Thomas Edison winter home, where he was the horticultural curator to Thomas Edison. He gave us permission to propagate (air layering) every plant in his collection. This act of generosity has allowed many varieties to be known that we never would have seen again. Mr. Halgrim moved the bulk of his collection to the Edison Estate after hurricane Donna struck in the sixties, where they remained until just recently.

Mr. Halgrim's passing lessens the croton world, but it is very much enriched by his legacy of introductions and knowledge that he shared with us. The passing of this man and our bridge to our croton history is sadly diminished.

Bob Alonso



Since there is a growing interest in hybridizing the plant Codiaeum Variegatum (Croton), we are reprinting some of the secrets of one of the last of the Great Hybridizers, JR & Nita Renfroe of N. Ft Myers, Florida USA.

The Art of Croton Hybridization

The hunt is on! Find a few Crotons that are in bloom. Most Crotons bloom when they are ready. There are some varieties that bloom constantly, while others rarely ever blossom. Some blossom when they are young, some blossom from stress (cold conditions or lack of water usually causes stress) and some blossom when they are very old and mature. Fertilizing with a fertilizer that is high in phosphorous will help, but be very careful not to overdo it; you can burn your parent plant! Crotons are one plant species that wants to survive, so they flower often to keep their species going.

Male and female flowers are born on the same plant; therefore, they are not bisexual and must be crossed for seeds to form. The cross must take place when the plants are ready. It is sometimes very difficult to find two plants that you may want to cross in bloom at the same time.

The female flower is ready when the petals form three little prongs. Usually you see nectar or a sticky substance on the little prongs, ready to accept the pollen from the male flower. The male flower is ready when lightly tapped and the pollen falls off, or strip the male flower through your hand. Take this pollen to a ripe female flower and brush lightly. Cross-pollination will take place within a few days. Little seeds will begin to form within 8 to 14 days. This is a crucial time to watch the seeds, as they are covered with a seed cover.



Pollinated
Female
Flower



Croton seeds are like little bombs and when ripe will blow up. The stem with ripening seeds should be encased in some form of coverage like a fiberglass screen bag with a wire tie. Some hybridizers use old stockings, however, the screen bag works best for us because it allows for air to flow through and does not allow moisture to build up.

When the seeds explode in the bag, carefully remove just the seed portion of the pod. Each pod will have up to 3 seeds in them. Plant them right away as croton seeds have a very short shelf life. A croton seed that is no longer any good will be soft and mushy when you squeeze it. Plant them within two or three weeks, otherwise, they will not germinate.



Use a good sterile potting soil to plant your seeds in, when the temperature is between 75-80 degrees. Keep them very moist during the germination process. If you want, you can cover the seedling tray with a clear plastic bag to keep the moisture even on the seeds. Bright light is essential for croton seeds to germinate. This took us many years of trial and error to learn. This does not mean bright sunlight, as this may cook your beautiful new seedlings. Some seeds sprout in a few days, while others may take thirty days.

When plants get true leaves or grow to at least 15 inches high, it is time to transplant your seedlings. Another Renfroe secret, is the slower the seed develops, the best color is expected. So don't be impatient, wait for all seeds to develop.

Most croton seedlings take at least 3 years before the color and/or leaf shape develops to its maturity.



Meeting Minutes

The July 30th meeting was hosted by Phil Stager at his tropical oasis with his beautiful display of Crotons. Penny McCracken gave a suggestion to attend the Green Thumbs festival and after some discussion of past participation, the decision was made that prospective buyers were not that interested in purchasing plants.

The members decided to use email for the newsletter distribution which will provide more color along with cost cutting. Overall, the majority of the membership has been agreeable to increasing the membership dues.

Other suggestions from the meeting were (1) members propagate plants for auctions, (2) an annual auction meeting where members can donate five or more plants. Ron Parlett and Nancy Herz have volunteered to head up the event and (3) conduct a work shop at USF either during the plant festival or at our meetings. Penny and Nancy have volunteered the use of their time and van to transport plants to the USF Fall festival. You can reach Penny at 727-527-8980. Volunteers are needed for the USF Sale. Please call Connie 813-968-9689.

The Sunken Gardens Plant sale on July 16th was a success. Phil Stager gave a lecture and tour of the Crotons at the Gardens.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 24th @ USF Botanical Gardens at 11:00 AM. Members are encouraged to send in agenda items for discussion at our next meeting and bring plants for an auction. As we have grown in numbers, active participation in society matters has lessened. We need your ideas, talents and help.

1st Annual Croton Extravaganza Coming Soon

By Dr. Ron Parlett

Okay, you have joined the Croton Society in the hopes of learning more about these beautiful plants, and you did. You probably have met some wonderful knowledgeable people to boot. You have also just about tapped out your local nurseries and Home Depots for all the varieties you can get your hands on. You have come to Croton Society meetings and bought some interesting varieties as well that have been auctioned off. Now, what would you do if you could go to one location and purchase eight or nine or more different varieties that you have been looking for high and low? Well that day is coming. The date is not firm but Saturday, November 5, 2005 looks to be that day.

The Croton Society is going through tough times financially, as with everything prices are going up. The cost of printing those beautiful calendars and Newsletters with all the color you expect, and the cost of postage is quickly consuming our treasury. Our only means of revenue are dues and plant sale percentages. We have prospered through the generosity of many, but we cannot expect it to continue like in the past. With this sad tale of concern springs the "Croton Extravaganza". We are asking our collectors and vendors to contribute a few plants to the cause. Many of us will do more because we have them and well, why not donate them. We will auction these plants off and the money is pure profit to the society.

A site is now being secured for this event in the Ft. Myers/Naples area. We feel that this gives everyone a comfortable travel distance. I know you share with me the excitement of this event. In order to make this a successful event, RSVP to me at crotonman@bellsouth.net or call me at (954) 894-8955. Please leave a message and I will contact you. Looking to hear from you soon!

Skeet Jones



Nocatee

