

# *The Codiaeum Connection*

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 3

December 2005

## **The Crotons of**



## **Australia**





## *A Message to the Members:*

As another year comes to an end, let us all take a moment to reflect on all of our blessings during this past year. Even though the year has been full of much turmoil with hurricanes and gasoline shortages, thankfully, our Croton Society members were able to pick up and continue on with everyday life.

In our next newsletter, we will feature a full length article with more pictures and descriptions of the varieties of Crotons found in Australia. The front and back covers feature some of the Crotons in Australia.

Over the past two seasons, many of our members who are collectors and growers have sustained massive amounts of damage to their Croton collections and inventory from the hurricanes. These devastating storms have destroyed many of the sought after varieties. The collectors and nurserymen have provided these rare plants through the society to the members over the last few years. We are now asking our members to share their plants to help them replenish their supply. Please contact Harold Lee at [Croton1@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:Croton1@tampabay.rr.com) or 813-264-2334 who is acting as the liaison for this effort. Let's get these varieties circulating again so we may accomplish our mission goals of identifying, propagation and distribution. If you have any rare plants that can be propagated, please contact us.

The Croton Society Officers want to wish all of our members a Healthy Happy New Year!!

*Scott Dozier, President*

*Harold Lee, Vice President*

*Connie Hoerstgen, Treasurer*

Crotons  
On  
Display

Up Coming Events:

**FLORIDA STATE FAIR**

February 9—20, 2006

**Family Living Competition**

Volunteer  
To help!

The Croton Society , once again , has the opportunity to participate in the Florida State Fair Horticulture display competition. We need YOU to volunteer for this creative challenge. Please call or email us if you are interested. You can call Connie at 813-968-9689 or email [choerstg@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:choerstg@tampabay.rr.com).



Society members who live on Florida's west coast may want to check out a granular fertilizer which Crotons seem to really love. It is an acid-releasing 7-5-8 which promotes new growth and enhances color as well. The brand is Florida's Finest Azalea, Camellia, Garden Special #4958, which is stocked in certain nurseries on the west coast, from Spring Hill to Ft. Myers. The fertilizer was specially made at the request of a regional garden distributor, using a formula which he had developed. Unfortunately, it is available only through the



nurseries which use this distributor, and none are on the east coast. However, if anyone on the east coast wants to order it, check with the manufacturer, Growers Fertilizer Corp., 1-800-343-1101. To find out which nurseries on the west coast have it, contact Perry Edge at :

**nedge@tampabay.rr.com.**

### **UPDATE:**

The USF Spring Sale will be held on April 8th and 9th 2006.

## **The Croton Society Inc.**

**P.O. Box 24892  
Tampa, FL 33623-4892  
(813) 968-9689 (Connie)  
croton1@tampabay.rr.com  
[www.crotons.org](http://www.crotons.org)**

**PRESIDENT**  
Scott Dozier  
Tel. & Fax. (239) 543-4020  
Email:

**VICE-PRESIDENT**  
Harold Lee  
Email: Croton1@tampabay.rr.com

**SECRETARY-EDITOR**  
(vacant)

**TREASURER**  
Connie Hoerstgen  
Email: choerstg@tampabay.rr.com

## **The next meeting**

of

**The Croton Society  
To be determined....**

### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Marilyn Barber—Plantation, FL  
Chelby Farms—Loxahatchee, FL  
Jim & Judy Glock—Fort Myers, FL  
Jeffrey Heyliger—Riverview, FL  
David King—Jensen Beach, FL  
Clark Kwiatkowski—Pompano Beach, FL  
Deborah Mastin—Miami, FL  
Carlos A. Quinones—San Juan, PR  
Barry Richards—Coral Springs, FL  
Vicki Rivrud—Palm Harbor, FL  
Trent Ward—Delray Beach, FL  
Nathan Williams—Indialantic, FL  
Steve Williams—St. Petersburg, FL

"MANY VARIETIES OF CROTONS"

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- Herbs & Vegetables • Fertilizers
- Cactus & Succulents • Mulches



# An Expert in the Making

"He's done more for Crotons than anybody else in the past 20 to 30 years" — Dr. Frank Brown

Many people spend a lifetime learning all of the "ins and outs" of Crotons, such as how to identify, cultivate, and propagate them. But one Society member has gained a remarkable expertise in the short span of just five years.

**Johnny Shelton**, 44, a noted automotive graphic artist from Ft. Lauderdale, has impressed many Society members not only with his encyclopedic knowledge, but also his ability to track down rare Crotons, including some of the historic collections of long-gone Croton hybridizers of southeast Florida.

Incredibly, Shelton had no interest in plants at all, before his brother gave him a copy of *Crotons of the World* by Dr. Frank Brown. Looking at the colors, shapes and textures of Crotons in that book, Shelton experienced an epiphany. He had seen this somewhere before, and then realized that the kaleidoscopic nature of Crotons mirrored his own work as a graphic artist. The bold colors and the subtle pastels he saw were exactly the same colors he used in creating artwork for vehicles. "Even the patterns, shapes and textures are duplicated," he said.

Like so many others, Shelton then caught *Croton fever* and decided to start collecting and propagating Crotons on his own. His efforts received a boost when he joined the Croton Society, where he sharpened his identification skills, and learned all the requirements for light, soil, water, fertilizer etc. by talking to countless people, and "asking a lot of questions."

He began by collecting Crotons from the yards of customers of this brother, who owns a lawn maintenance business, which caused him to expand his search into other locales. After learning about the work of the southeast Florida hybridizers who were active in the 1920's and 30's, he wondered if the Croton collections of these men still existed. Using good investigative techniques, he tracked down addresses of their former residences, then he went to see what was there.

Shelton was delighted to find that the collections of Aubrey Christian and Leyland Rousch which were largely intact, and he was able to secure cuttings from the current owners. He also obtained cuttings of Crotons which made up the Ralph Davis and Robert Halgrim collections. Shelton is continuing to research some of the other "lost" collections of hybridizers of the area.



When Shelton first moved into his home, there were only two Crotons in the yard. Now he has almost 800 varieties, (well over 600 identified) including some of the very rarest. In keeping with the mission of the Croton Society, he is not one to hoard his collection. For example, he propagated an incredible 400 of the rare *Thomas Edison* this year, most of which will be available at Society plant sales. At past sales, he has offered such sought-after Crotons as Rudy Bachman, Polychrome, and Picturatum. "I'm fascinated that something so easy to grow can be so beautiful", he commented about his efforts.

Shelton met Dr. Brown several years ago, and he made quite an impression on the Codiaeum expert. "I think the world of him" says Brown. "He is a great (Society) member...he impresses people wherever he goes. He really has advanced the Society, and the best part is that he is willing to share with others."

Article by: Perry Edge



## Update on Dr. Frank Brown

Last year, Dr. Brown's Valkaria Tropical Garden, which houses his Crotons as well as many other tropicals, suffered extensive hurricane damage. Many pine trees were brought down, crushing plants and reducing shade. But a year later, "things look better than ever," Dr. Brown said. He has added to the collection through trips to Southeast Asia. Members who wish to visit Valkaria Tropical Garden (near Melbourne) can check the calendar in *Florida Gardening* magazine for dates when the garden is open to the public.

## **EBURNEUMS** , The Most Distinctively, Unusual of Codiaeums

When I wrote "Florida Beautiful Croton" published in 1960, the following description was made of a Codiaeum called Eburneum:

"This variety is so unusual that many individuals do not recognize it as a Croton. It deserves more attention.... "Rare".

This observation is perhaps more relevant than ever today. No one seems to be propagating this most rare and unusual Codiaeum and it is rarely, if ever, seen in Codiaeums collections. yet, it is hardy, easy to grow and a truly beautiful specimen, undoubtedly the rarest and most exquisite of Florida's Codiaeums.



In 1964, on a Croton collecting trip to Australia at the Botanical gardens of Cairns, I was astounded by finding an obvious Eburneum with long and narrow leaves. The variety in Florida, by contrast, has short broad leaves. Unfortunately, the Cairns Garden had only one plant, small and in a 6 inch pot. In spite of my excitement over this find, I did not have the heart to ask for it. Instead, I visited a dozen other Botanical gardens in Australia searching for a plant but I never found another.

At that time, we knew of two Eburneums, the Florida variety with short broad leaves and the Australian type with long narrow leaves. Both, with the same ivory and green colors and distinctly thick leaves.

In 1985, on a Croton exploration trip in Thailand in a remote area of forest near a Thai temple, I discovered a third very obvious Eburneum variety.



This one had the same thick leaves, ivory and green in color but with just a touch of pink. Of course, I brought a cutting back to Florida. Once it was rooted, I gave it to the great Codiaeum collector, John Bender. He has grown it beautifully in his croton garden and generously shared it with other croton collectors.

So now, we have three Eburneums, the pink from Thailand, long leaved from Australia and Florida's short broad leaved type. All with leaves thicker than other Codiaeums.



Epitomized, the Eburneums are the most remarkable different types of Codiaeums. They are rare and beautiful and belong in every Codiaeum garden.

With reference to the Australia long leaved type, it is not currently available in the United States, but the Croton Society has recently imported one plant. If this plant survives the trip, the Society plans to propagate it and in the summer of 2006, have a raffle with the names of all Society members. The name drawn will receive the first propagation of the Australia long leaves variety.

Good luck in the raffle, believe me, the Australian Eburneum is a treasure.

*Article by Dr. Frank Brown*



# Color in Cozumel

Article By: Ray Hernandez



A tropical plant fanatic looks for any excuse to leave the subtropical confines of the Florida peninsula in search of the “real” tropics. When my girlfriend suggested we take a 5 day cruise to the Caribbean, I thought about it for 5 seconds or so before responding with a resounding yes!

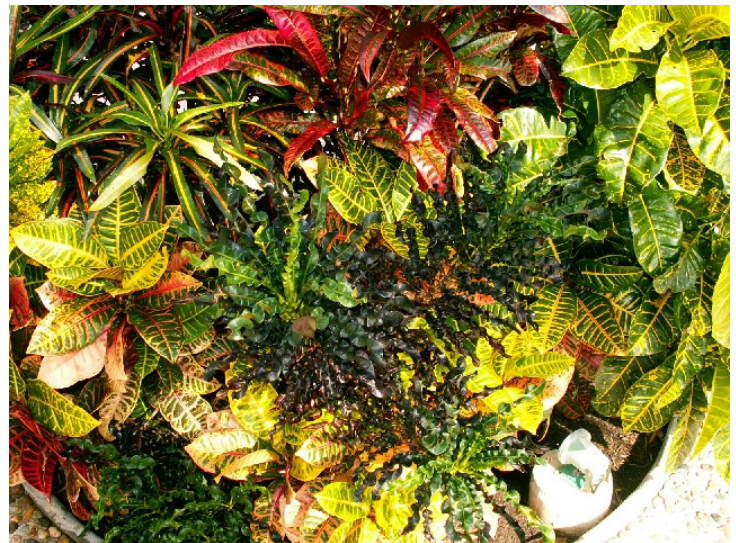
The two ports of call on our agenda were Grand Cayman, still recovering from Hurricane Ivan, and Cozumel which was spared all of last summer’s cyclones. Grand Cayman is slowly rebuilding and putting the island nation back to where it was before Ivan. Unlike the infrastructure in the Caymans however, the vegetation there will require years to recover from Ivan’s effects. The locals refer to the dark day last September as “the other September 11<sup>th</sup>”. On the flip side of the coin, Cozumel escaped the fury of the 2004 hurricane season. Situated just off the coast of Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, Cozumel enjoys the classic tropical climate of the Caribbean without being in the crosshairs of hurricane alley. It was here, in Cozumel, that I encountered the best public display of crotons outside of a botanical garden.



After disembarking the ship and going through customs, one enters a new entertainment complex filled with discount jewelry and liquor stores. The landscaping in this complex was incredible to say the least. Palms, Cordylines, Philodendrons, Bromeliads and Orchids were just some of what could be found planted out to greet cruisers. More importantly, it was here that some common and not so common crotons were planted in stunning groups.



While my girlfriend shopped, I meandered about the complex with digital camera in hand! With a Canary Island Date or Coconut palm as the center pieces, small islands were cut out of the concrete walkways to make room for these elaborate kaleidoscopes of color. Among the plants that I could ID were the following: Gloriosa, Interruptum, Spirale, Rapture, Yellow Interruptum, Andreanum, Bogoriensis, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Reliance, Charles Rutherford, Robert Lavallois, Mortii, Rheedii, Stewartii, Regina, Davis #3, Petra, Aureo Maculatum, Ovalifolium and Irene Kingsley.



There were several varieties that I could not identify but they were no less spectacular. Of note was the leaf size that the tropical sun helped yield in some varieties. Crotons grown here, in my own little piece of the Arctic Circle (Tampa), rarely, if ever, achieve leaves of such gargantuan size. The gorgeous beds inspired me to plant more crotons and/or move somewhere with a year round tropical climate.



## GROWER'S TIPS:

# WINTER PROPAGATION OF CUTTINGS



By Perry Edge

People living in sub-tropical climates often think that the arrival of Old Man Winter spells the end of the Croton propagation season, unless one is lucky enough to have a heated greenhouse. It's true that when the ambient (air) temperature drops below 65°, root production of cuttings can be adversely affected. But the key to winter propagation is not so much the temperature around the part of the cutting that is above ground; rather it's the **soil temperature** that is critical. In this case, soil means rooting medium, and the magic number to achieve is 70-71° F. The ideal setup is to have the ambient temperature cooler than the soil; otherwise the cutting produces new growth but has little or no root development.

Indirectly, heating the soil by heating the air around the cuttings is not the most effective way to accomplish this task. However, some clever devices have been created for this purpose. Two of the most common and inexpensive heating tools are the soil heating cable and the heating mat. If your local garden shop doesn't carry them, both items can be purchased over the Internet. Each require an electrical source to operate.

With either heating device, build a frame out of 2"x4" pressure treated wood, set on edge. For the cable, follow the manufacturer's specifications to obtain the proper square footage for the length of cable. The cable can be attached to hardware cloth which in turn is attached to the bottom of the frame. Fill the frame to the top with rooting medium, or else place a number of small pots into the frame over a thin layer of sand, and fill in around the pots with sand. Don't let the pots come into direct contact with the heat source. The heat will then transfer to the rooting medium in the pots. For the mat, simply build a frame slightly larger than the mat's dimensions, and fill as above. Materials commonly used for the rooting medium are coarse sand, a mixture of one part peat and one part Perlite (by volume), or one part peat and one part sand (by volume). **Do not** use vermiculite; it can retain too much moisture and rot the stems.

Fall and winter propagation does not always require a mist system; as high humidity can often be maintained if the frame is covered. A simple covered frame is illustrated in figure 1. Use ½ inch PVC pipe, bent to fit into holes drilled in the top of the frame (or use pipe straps), and cover with clear plastic. Water and drain the rooting medium, then mist the leaves before covering the frame. The larger the humidity frame, the more important it is to keep a careful watch over the rooting medium, as under no circumstances should it be allowed to dry out. Keep the frame in a protected area in bright light, but not in direct sun. Make sure the plastic does not touch the leaves.

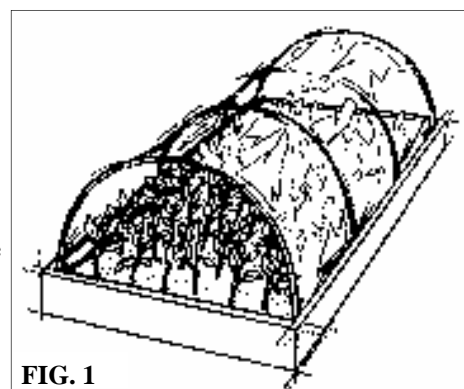


FIG. 1

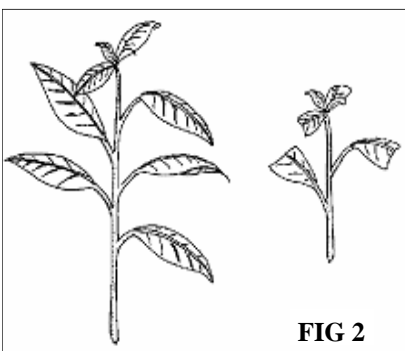


FIG 2

Speaking of leaves, there is a way to reduce the separation shock to the cutting and speed up rooting. Figure 2 illustrates how to take a cutting and remove and trim the leaves. Make a cutting of 6-8" in length, then divide it into several smaller pieces, each with a few leaves and several inches of stem. Trim the leaves to about ½ the original length; cut off more for the larger leaf varieties. Rooting hormone is useful, but be careful to use only a small amount at a time, and never return the unused portion to the original container, as contamination will almost certainly occur.

The best part is that the covered frame which you make for winter can also be used throughout the rest of the year. Just remove and clean the heating device, replace the rooting medium and you're good to go! ☀

### For Further Reading:

- Bryant, G. 1995. *Propagation Handbook*. Stackpole Books: Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.
- Dirr, M. A. and C. W. Heuser, Jr. 1987. *The Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation: From Seed to Tissue Culture*. Varsity Press: Athens, Georgia.
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- McMillan Browne, P. D. A. 1978. *Plant Propagation*. Simon and Schuster: New York.
- Too good, A. 1993. *Plant Propagation Made Easy*. Timber Press: Portland, Oregon.





**Zulu**



**Zanzibar**