

# *The Codiaeum Connection*

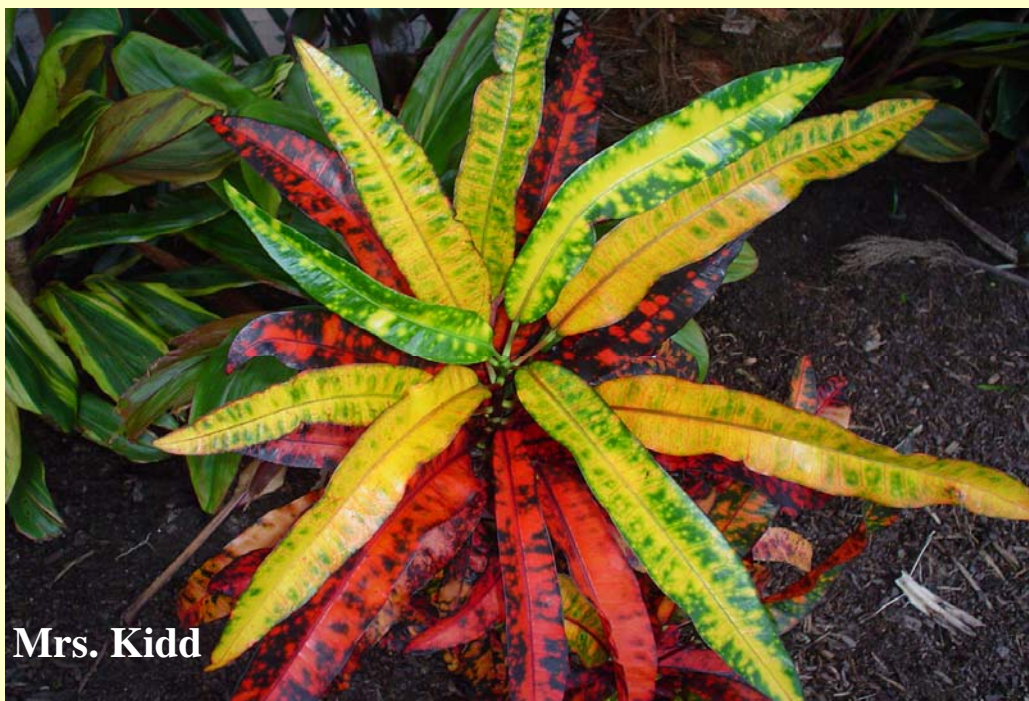
VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

June 2006



**Golden Ring**

## **The Crotons of Australia Continued....**



**Mrs. Kidd**



## *A Message to the Members:*

The board would like to let the membership know that it regrets the delay of the March 2006 issue of the newsletter. Without sufficient articles, we are not able to produce a newsletter with the quality our members have come to know and enjoy.

We need your help by submitting your newsletter articles and photos to us as soon as you have them. Because of the delay, we are sending a double edition newsletter.

Thank you to our members Stuart & Carolyn Clark, Glenn R. Cooke, Kevin Hayes along with Sam Archer of Hervey Bay Nurseries in Australia for submitting interesting articles and pictures of unusual crotons for publication in this quarter's newsletter.

We are in the process of putting together an article on Croton sports. If you have any Crotons that have a sport on it, please send pictures to us preferably while the sport is on the parent plant. We also need pictures of known and named sports.

*Scott Dozier, President*  
*Harold Lee, Vice President*  
*Connie Hoerstgen, Treasurer*



**Indian Headdress**



**Magnifica**

**Crotons  
For  
Sale**

### **DON'T MISS THE CROTON SOCIETY'S 9TH ANNUAL CROTON FIESTA**

**SATURDAY, October 14th, 10-4**

**Sunday, October 15th, 10-3**

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

**Volunteer**

#### **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.



On Line Seed Auction:

Note: some *Codiaeum variegatum* seeds are listed in the seed price history section.

Register now for an online auction of rare seeds from cycads, palms, fruit and flowering trees.

The auction is sponsored by the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association, with Montgomery Botanical Center and Flamingo Gardens as the primary affiliate contributing gardens. New offerings are posted every two weeks.

The auction is located at [www.botanicalauctions.com](http://www.botanicalauctions.com). Please visit the website for more information about this seed auction as well as terms and conditions and shipping information.

**Tip of the month:**

During this time of extreme dry weather, make sure to water your plants as often as possible. Check for and treat spider mites.

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**The next meeting**

of

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

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Joseph Barbara - Plantation, FL  
Leonard C. Barefield - New Smyrna, FL  
Virginia Barthelemy-Tampa, FL  
Derrick Brewster-Ft. Myers, FL  
Kyle Courtney - Norwalk, Iowa  
Doris Decker-Brandon, FL  
Jesus Garmas-Miami, FL  
Janet Moppert-Ft. Lauderdale, FL  
Darlene Morris-Tomball, TX  
Sheila Strunz-Orlando, FL

"MANY VARIETIES OF CROTONS"

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# Crotons in Australia

by Stuart & Carolyn Clarke

Australia is a large country with a diverse range of climatic conditions. The majority of the population live in the coastal areas, as the inland is mostly desert or semi-desert.

The tropical areas in the far north include Cairns (in the state of Queensland) and Darwin (in the northern Territory). The climate in these regions is influenced by the monsoon season.

Southern coastal areas of Queensland to about Coffs Harbour on the northern coast of New South Wales are generally regarded as being subtropical, though towns further away from the coast may experience cool nights and frosty mornings (but perfect daytime temperatures). Towns on the west of the Great Dividing Range (which runs down the entire east coast and into the southern state of Victoria) are cool to cold in winter. The more populated cities such as Sydney and Melbourne are warm temperate to cool temperate. Adelaide (the capital of South Australia) and Perth (the capital of Western Australia) are probably best described as being a Mediterranean climate - cool wet winters / hot dry summers. The island state of Tasmania is cool to cold temperate. With this in mind the overseas reader may better appreciate the whims of the Australian Horticultural Industry.

The population of Australia is only a fraction of the USA and with most of that population living in the cooler areas, you will understand why most of the plants grown by the industry is aimed at what will grow well outdoors in a cooler climate. These plants are produced in huge numbers and distributed willy nilly throughout the country. Plants such as New Zealand Flax and the New Zealand cordylines have been sold (in large numbers) in tropical areas such as Cairns. Naturally they struggle and usually collapse once the humidity rises.

Until very recent times tropical plants such as crotons, cordyline, philodendrons etc. were produced mainly for the indoor trade in the south. They were generally regarded as second rate plants when compared to roses, azaleas and the like. Therefore most of the tropical beauties were grown and sold unnamed. In more recent times, things have changed dramatically. The population of the state of Queensland has boomed and Sydney gardeners discovered that given the right microclimate they could grow many tropical plants. Tropical gardens have become the 'In' look among landscapers. Cordylines, bromeliads have proved very popular and now much to our joy, crotons are making a big impression in the popularity stakes.

The influence of the release and brilliant marketing of the 'Colours of Africa' series cannot be overstated. It caused the average Australian gardener to take notice of crotons - the true queen of colourful foliage. Most crotons are sold these days with names. Unfortunately the habit of changing names to try and confuse the public and thus sell more plants is rife.

More and more collectors are being enchanted by wide colour range and leaf type of crotons. Sadly the collectors of the past have all but disappeared and with them their knowledge of the plants and the names of the older varieties. At this time we have not been able to locate anyone in this country who is able to guide us with reliable information. Thus the naming of *Codiaeum variegatum* cultivar in this country is still a problem. With so many people now collecting and propagating cuttings the old time cultivars are starting to reappear and we know not the names for many of them. The Croton Society will be putting out a CD-ROM to help the novice with plant identification.

## **Old-time favourites.**

Some of the oldies, which appear in many Queensland gardens, include 'Veitchii', 'Irene Kingsley', 'Stoplight', 'Mona Lisa', 'Ovalifolium', 'Ram's Horn', 'Aureo Maculatum', 'Punctatum', 'Andreanum', 'General Paget', 'Bravo', 'Rheedii', 'Craigii', 'Petra', 'Norma' and 'Captain Kidd'. Plants like 'Tiger Eye', 'Eburneum' (broader and narrow leaf forms), 'Canary Girl', 'Angel Wing' and 'McAdoo' are keenly sought after.

Continued on next page:





Zulu



Togo



African Bell



Congo



Africa



Voodoo



Zanzibar



Zambezi



### **The 'Colours' of Africa' series**

'Zulu' - the first of the series is a beautiful plant but many people (including ourselves) have found it to be difficult to establish.

'Afrika' This variety took its time to colour up but it was worth the wait. It is an extremely good grower.

'Congo' and 'Zanzibar' are very colourful and quite hardy.

'Masai' - Bright colours. For us not as hardy as 'Africa' but our latest purchase appears to be doing well.

'Togo' we love it but it doesn't seem to like us and it continues to struggle. But we are stubborn.

'Voodoo' Colourful and hardy.

'Zambesi' We have lost the nametag and don't know whether the plant survived or not.

'Mammie' and 'Bell' (sold as 'African Bell') have been added to the Colours of Africa series. 'Mammie' would have to top the list of modern day favourites. It is available in large numbers in almost every nursery. It has earned its popularity being very colourful and bright, hardy and tolerates full sun conditions.

Other recent releases include 'Sunny Star', 'Gold King', 'Bangkok Flame', 'Carnival Clown', 'Carnival Jack' and 'Little Mia'.

One of the rarest varieties in this country is a beautiful sport from 'Mona Lisa'. In full sun this plant is a brilliant yellow while in part shade the colour diffuses to a yellowish green. This plant remains unnamed.

We also have a sport on our 'Congo' which looks very much like a smaller leafed 'Mammie' without the twist.

When spring arrives in September hopefully this sport can be marcotted and grown on to its full potential.

### **Pests & Diseases**

Mealy bugs are a big problem in the present drought affected climate.

Looper Caterpillars can decimate the foliage in a very short time frame.

The Australian native Fruit Spotting Bug is becoming a real pest as the number of croton bushes in the neighborhood increase. These pests attack the growing points of the plant and suck the sap from the plant. This causes the young growth to wither and die. The plant usually recovers and sends out new growth. However, if the insect has previously fed on a diseased plant it will introduce the disease to its new host.

Crotons are among our favourite plants and we are very pleased that other Australians are discovering just how beautiful they are.





# A CROTON WITH AN IDENTITY CRISIS

THE *MAMMIE* CROTON SEEMS TO PRODUCE MORE VARIATIONS THAN ANY OTHER CROTON. IT IS CAPABLE OF GIVING US UNIQUE HYBRIDS.

Everyone knows the *Mammie* Croton. It is one of the most common varieties, and you see it everywhere in Florida landscapes. And while it is both colorful and has unusual leaves, serious Croton collectors tend to dismiss this one as an overproduced variety, and after all, who wants a Croton which everybody else has?



But the next time you pass by a clump of *Mammies*, slow down and take a closer look. You may just find a unique Croton hiding amongst the foliage. While all Crotons are genetically unstable, and can occasionally produce a mutation, the *Mammie* seems even more inclined to do so. Such mutations (called a *sport* in horticultural terms) present themselves as a branch which has leaves that look nothing like the rest of the plant. Propagating these sports by air layer or cuttings can give a collector an exciting new hybrid. However, be aware that occasionally, a propagated sport can revert back to its parent plant by growing a sport of its own.

Sometimes when Crotons produce a sport, it can be downright ugly, and if it happens on your plant, you probably would want to remove it. But the *Mammie* sports I have seen are usually quite interesting. So far, I have found three types:

- A variety with moderately wide, slightly cupped elongated leaves, 6-8 inches long, with no curl or twist. (Fig. 1)  
This seems to be the most common sport.
- A similar looking variety, but one which has leaves  $\frac{1}{2}$  the size of the above (Fig. 2)
- A sport with long, thin, straight leaves (Fig. 3)

How do Crotons mutate? Sometimes the plant's DNA gets scrambled, and the Croton will usually repair or destroy the damage, but not always. Occasionally, if the plant does not perceive a threat from the mutation, it allows it to remain. The reason why a Croton mutates is a matter of speculation. Possible mutagens include chemicals, pollution, and ultra-violet radiation from the sun. Whatever the reason, *Mammie* sports are a welcome gift to the world of Crotons.

**IMPORTANT!** If you see a sport on someone else's property, always ask for permission before taking a cutting. Otherwise, you would be trespassing and committing petty theft. I have found people to be very cooperative in granting permission. Many commercial properties are landscaped with large groups of *Mammies*, which makes them an ideal hunting ground. When you remove a sport, leave a few inches on that particular branch, so that it will grow back as before. Don't forget to look for seedlings growing under the plants; you could discover the next great *Mammie* hybrid ! Happy hunting and good luck! ☀



Fig. 1

by Perry Edge



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



## *The Australian Connection*

by Harold Lee

From the land that has brought us unique Palm, ginger and numerous awesome tropicals to the horticultural world, has now made its mark with the Queen of Color—Crotons.

Although Crotons have been available from its early years of settlement (1824), Australia's earliest nursery listing had 14 cultivars:

Croton augustifolia	Mortii	Picturatus
Diversiflora	Undulatum	Youngii
Latifolia	Pictum	
Laurifolia	Spiralis	
Limbatum	Veitchii	
Longifolium	Volutes	

Many of these varieties possibly have different names today and we are trying to identify these using reference materials such as older nursery catalogs, books magazine and hybridizer notes. Mortii, Undulatum (Piecrust), Pictum, Spiralis and Veitchii have been identified. If you are aware of any materials that might be used for identification, please be sure to let us know. We have found that pictures, along with descriptions, are the best source of information.

In the early years, it was also noted that Rockhampton Botanical Gardens had hundreds of varieties. Quite a few crotons in North Queensland were sourced in New Guinea. The Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney had a few listings of Crotons in their Research Library: Curtis Botanical Magazine (1831), Gardeners Chronicle (various-1868-1897), and 'New & Rare Beautiful Leaved Plants' by Shirley Hibberd (1870).

According to Sam Archer of Hervey Bay Nurseries, common Crotons include Mortii, Captain Kidd, Mrs. Iceton, Veitchii, Baron De Rothschild, Norma, Sandarii, Petra and Excellent.

Croton of interest that stand out are The Queen, King George, Jacob's Coat, Spotlight (not to be confused with Stoplight), Long Leaf Eburneum, Princess Mary and a great variety of sports and seedlings that have developed over the years. Mona Lisa Red, possibly a sport of Mona Lisa, has tremendous color when grown in the shade. There is also a very common variety that looks like a broad leaf Captain Kidd.

As more varieties are introduced, it seems that the Croton fever is spreading faster. Imports from Thailand have shown up on the market as well as the Colours of Africa Series, adding additional color and flavor.

As the Croton Society expands its membership base, there are always new varieties that are found that cannot be identified. We are in the process of creating a Croton Identification Database which will include as many of the known crotons that we can get photos of and identify. It is a tremendous project as Crotons are so diverse that you can put two crotons in different areas of your landscape and they can look completely different. We are trying to get as many photos of the same variety cataloged mainly because Crotons can look so different depending on the time of year, fertilization, location and light conditions. We would like to encourage participation in this project to all members of the Society.



**Mona Lisa Red**



**Jacob's Coat**







# SOCIETY DISPLAY EARNS 'SILVER' AT STATE FAIR



TAMPA—The Croton Society captured second place for its display at the 2006 Florida State Fair in February. The Society's effort was judged against those of other horticultural societies, and competition was intense. It was by far one of the best exhibits that the society has offered at this event, aided by receiving twice the space normally allocated for its display, and was filled to capacity with a dazzling collection of Crotons. Without the plants donated by Ray Hernandez, Lyla Shepard, Phil Stager, Harold Lee, Perry Edge, and Nancy and Bruce Herz, this incredible display would not have been possible. Nancy & Bruce Herz designed a large banner (above), the sign below (which displays our beautiful ribbon), as well as colorful plant labels. Harold Lee's expertise as a landscape designer paid off in the composition of the display, which featured palms, stepping stones, a bench and bamboo curtain backdrop. Information about Croton propagation and care were featured as part of the educational component. Many people remarked about how colorful the display was, and as usual, the comment "I never knew that there are so many different kinds of Crotons," was heard over and over from visitors.





# OAK TEA FOR CROTONS



Have you ever wondered why many rivers have such a dark color to the water? It's because of the constant shedding of leaves and other debris from riparian trees and plants into the water. As this material breaks down, it releases tannic acid, which stains the water a dark color. The same process gives tea its dark hue.

So what does this have to do with Crotons? Well, they are an acid-loving plant, and tannic acid is a good organic source, especially if you use oak leaves. Not only do oak leaves make a great mulch, releasing acid as they break down, but you can also use them to make a "tea" which your Crotons will really love.

For best results, use oak leaves which are thin and papery, such as the Laurel Oak. Avoid leaves which are tough and leathery, as found in the Live Oak, because they take a long time to break down.

**Recipe:** Take a five-gallon bucket and fill it  $\frac{1}{3}$  full with oak leaves. Add water to fill the bucket, then let it sit for a week, or until the water is dark brown. To speed up the process, add boiling water. When ready, strain the solution, and use full strength as needed. Don't throw away the leaves, they can be used as mulch or in compost. Any unused portion of the solution can be stored in a shady spot.

Source: [www.Davesgarden.com](http://www.Davesgarden.com) , B. Frank Brown Ed. D "Crotons of the World".

by Perry Edge

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## USF SPRING FLING 2006

The April 2006 , USF Spring Sale was another great event for the Croton Society. Sunshine and a warm breeze made for a perfect weekend. We had a large turn out with our repeated buyers along with many new plant enthusiasts.

A very special "Thank You" goes out to Society member Terry Seeley (Croton Connection of South Florida) who donated pots of Crotons for this event. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. Also thanks to Scott Dozier for coordinating the delivery of Crotons from A.W. Kelley Gardens in Fort Myers for our sale. Thanks to all of our volunteer members who helped with the set up and sales. Without your help, the Croton Society 's participation would not be possible.



Perry Edge, making sure all of the plants are watered and look their best before the gates open.







**King George**



**Princess Mary**



**The Queen**