

The Codiaeum Connection

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 2

May 2008

The Croton Society Salutes John Bender



CORNERSTONE

Many words can describe Croton Society Honorary Member John Bender. During the past 10 years, he has generously and humbly maintained a prolific flow of Crotons from his collection into the hands of many Croton aficionados. Having laid the foundation of sharing since the inception of the Croton Society, John has never wavered from sharing his secrets of growing Crotons, nor the giving away of monstrous 3 ft. air layers of rare varieties. I specifically remember a Croton Society plant sale where John showed up with a trunk full of rare Croton air layers, to distribute to all of the members that had volunteered for the event.

This edition of the Codiaeum Connection stands as a testimonial of the contributions of John Bender. Most, if not all of the photos, are plants that John has distributed, either thru the Croton Society or individuals that know him. It is but a small glimpse of the sensory overload that we all have experienced by visiting his Croton Paradise. We only need to look at our own collections to know that somewhere up the pyramid; there is a strong chance that many of them originated from John's collection.

Many of us have had the pleasure and experience of John's demeanor, his humble attitude and his unending generosity. I was truly amazed to stand with him among the kaleidoscope of riveting colors and to hear him describe it as, 'They are just a bunch of plants'.

Due to time restraints, we have not contacted everyone who knows and appreciate the blessings of John Bender. We plan on having a portion of the next newsletter set aside for those who wish to contribute your experiences, stories and/or pictures. Please feel free to email me or send your articles to the Croton Society's P. O. Box.

Join us, as we give tribute to our Cornerstone, Mr. John Bender.

Harold Lee
President



ON THE COVER

Top: Unknown Codiaeum at John Bender's.
Bottom: Left side of John Bender's driveway.

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The Greatest of Them All

Since becoming interested in Croton during the 1950's, I have searched the Tropical World looking for unique and unusual types. Important among places visited include Australia, Okinawa, Taiwan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, The Philippines, and Amboina, the Island where Crotons originated.

But nowhere have I found croton gardens with the quality, numbers of varieties and significance as the garden croton grower John Bender in Ft. Lauderdale.

John has devoted both his active life and retirement to the collection of beautiful and unique varieties of hybrid crotons. More than anyone else in the world, Bender has collected, exhibited, and shared the worlds' most beautiful crotons.

His collection includes all of the Miami Croton developed between 1920 and 1930, the great decade of croton hybridization. By maintaining and carefully selecting, he has made a greater contribution than anyone else to preserving the true names and history of croton development.

B. Frank Brown



John Bender, Johnny Shelton, Harold Lee, Scott Dozier and Dr. B. Frank Brown share a rare moment at Valkaria Gardens, Fla.

THE 'POPE' OF CROTON GROWERS

The first time I met Mr. Bender was on a road trip with Ron Parlett and Harold Lee. On the way down, they told me I would be in shock once I've seen his crotons. I thought to myself, yeah right, but I decided to write down directions to his place. I think it was Lee that asked me if I was writing down directions, and I told him yes, but chances were I wouldn't be back. Ron said that I would be back.

We pulled into the drive, and I noticed he had a few crotons in front and on the left side of the house. I thought, is this it? Well, we went to the right side and passed through a wooden gate. Once I was in, I thought I had died and gone to Croton Heaven. I've never seen so many beautiful and different crotons. I could not comprehend how a person could have found so many varieties. Needless to say, that wasn't my last time going to see Mr. Bender.

My collection grew very large thanks to Mr. Bender, I can never thank him enough. To me, he is the POPE of croton growers, and always will be.

Keith Hanks



Candy Cane

Dr. Frank Brown knows a thing or two about Crotons. He's traveled to the far corners of the globe, and he's seen all types of Croton collections, from botanical gardens to those of private collectors. And he's never seen an equal to the collection which John Bender possessed.

His passion for Crotons began many years ago, when he saw a copy of Dr. Brown's book *Florida's Beautiful Crotons* in a library. He eventually met Dr. Brown, and the two formed a strong friendship, bound by their mutual love for Crotons. Such was Dr. Brown's regard for his friend, that he gave him the ultimate honor of naming a Croton after him. He is further distinguished by the Croton Society's naming him as an honorary member.

When Bender started collecting in earnest, he emphasized quality over quantity. But that didn't stop him from collecting over 400 varieties, with which he created tapestries composed of solid masses of crotons, filling every available space in his front and back yard. Visitors marveled that such a collection could exist outside of the great botanical gardens of the world. Dr. Brown simply called it "the best collection of quality Crotons *anywhere.*"

Perry Edge



Puccini



Rudy Bachman

John Bender, A True Collector

Looking back through the years, I have crossed paths with many plant people. As a general rule, plant people are honest and giving. This brief note is to bring to light one of the real gentleman in the croton world, namely, John Bender of Plantation Florida.

With most, a common interest brings us together, as both will have a genuine fondness for the group of plants, and crotons are a good example of that. The plants are easy to propagate, and more often than not, the collectors are willing to share plants.

Many years ago, (just how many I can not remember), Dr. Brown asked me if I could assist a friend of his from the east coast of the state in securing crotons from the Edison home collection. I was in a good position to do this as I was a good friend of Bob and Mary Halgrim.

My first impression of John were twofold, the first was his generosity, as he brought a station wagon full of established crotons for the Edison home. The second, was his humble nature, as I first witnessed when I brought him to the Halgrim's for a visit.

Both men had so much in common, namely they both knew the croton "greats" from their heyday in Miami. We all became good friends from the start, and Mr. Halgrim so respected John, that he instructed me to go to the Edison home and allow John to propagate any and all of the croton collection that he wished, and that he would personally call there to make sure the powers-to-be at the Edison home cooperated.

John has always been a real gentleman, always happy to see me on short notice. I took Mr. and Mrs. Halgrim to John Bender's for a visit once many years ago. Mr. Halgrim saw many plants he had not seen in years, one of note was a Halgrim seedling named, *Your Highness*. Mr. Halgrim lost his plant years ago but gave a plant to Henry Coppinger. Thanks to John Bender who secured the plant from the Coppinger collection before it was lost. Time and time again we see Crotons that would not be with us today if it had not been for John Bender's efforts.

Bob Alonzo



John Bender and Bob Alonzo in serious Croton identification mode.



Yellow Sybil Griffin



Dayspring



Carot



Dr. B. Frank Brown



*Glen Roof's
Coral Showers*

*Even more
of the
beauty of
Mr. John
Bender's
contribu-
tions.*



Delaware



Bob Alonzo introduced me to John Bender in 2000 when he came to identify my Croton collection. He saw that I had a Christiana and asked if he could have it to complete his Christian collection. In addition to giving him Christiana, I gave him copious buckets of manure and shavings for his plants. He in return gave me many beautiful pink crotons for my collection.

John's garden is very beautiful; a sight that will forever be etched in memory. He is a great grower, always tweaking each variety with the proper amount of sunlight, fertilizer and mulch; pruning each croton so that "the whole image" fits together, like a lovely puzzle of varying colors and shapes.

John is very knowledgeable, quick to encourage, generous, and a most humble man.

Carol (Cookie) Graff





I first met John Bender at the Croton Society's first meetings and at the Croton Fiestas in Ybor City, Tampa. During my first visit to his home in January, 2001, I left there with a car full of crotons including Diane, Sybil Griffin, Polychrome, Irene Kinsley and a Joanne Roof (very rare). Later that year, both he and Bob Alonzo were in my yard and had a few good natured discussions over the correct names of a few mystery Croton varieties. He readily shared his expertise and, when available, cuttings and air layers of his crotons.

Phil Stager



Salute to John Bender

There is no question concerning John's love for crotons and his generosity in providing rare and hard to come by crotons to croton lovers. Years ago after getting John's phone number from a mysterious and cautious Frank Brown, I called John up out of the blue and basically invited myself to his home in Plantation. I was like a kid in a candy store. John was a gracious host showing me around his place, before departing, he asked me if there was a croton I would like (I am sure he asked because I was too shy to) I said I love that yellow curly one. It turned out to be Cronstadt. Over the years and many more visits later, he provided me with many more varieties with the understanding that I would grow them out and make cuttings and air layers available to other croton lovers, in other words, pay it forward and that is exactly what I did. In my opinion, John Bender has single handedly advanced the spread of rare, hard to find crotons through the Croton Society, more than any other person, and there are some good people on this list.

"Thanks for everything John".

Ron Parlett



My Favorite Croton

Humans have a genetic code which makes each one of us an individual. There are infinite characteristics and factors which contribute to making us all unique. One important variable includes that of our environment. Parental I influence, sibling birth order, financial status, education, nutrition, and the list can go on.

Similarly with crotons, we may all have the same plant cultivar, but with different soil pH, sunlight intensity, exposure to the wind, temperatures, or fertilization, all will look slightly different.....possibly even extremely different.

Much like that one child who looks or acts slightly different from all the rest, you can not help but focus your attention on them. They gain a level of respect and favoritism for just being different. They are often called the “black sheep” of the family, since they are indeed somehow different from the rest of the group.

The same is true of my favorite croton. I am not certain as to where I got this as a small cutting, whether it be a trash pile of clippings, if a friend gave me it, or I just happen to find it on my own, but nonetheless, it is my “black sheep” croton since it is different. And if for nothing more, I love it.

It is so unique in fact, that many have seen it and have not been able to identify it at all. I pushed some cuttings into the damp ground beneath a grouping of growing palms in 2000. It gets filtered sun most of the day and is on the eastern side of my house, blocking most of the late western afternoon summer sun.

It's a narrow leaf, measuring about 2-3 inches wide and about 12 inches long. It has a darker, almost maroon colored, petiole emerging from the stem. This color does not fade with the age of the specific leaf.



As you can see from the photos, the distinctly yellow leaves are the result of many hours of sunlight. The second photograph is still the same plant, just enjoying much more dappled sunlight for most of the day.

Is the color really *that* spectacular? Not really. Is the leaf shape really *that* strange? No. Is the plant a real *show stopper*? I would disagree. So really, this croton that I refer to as “Black sheep,” is nothing more than different and indescribable. This makes it the favorite of my collection----just because it *is* different. It even makes the croton experts scratch their heads!

Rick Leitner, Ft. Lauderdale

Florida State Fair 2008



The 2008 Florida Fair Display received a 6th place ribbon this year. A very big Thank you to Nancy and Bruce Herz for taking the lead on making it all happen this year! Your generosity of donating the back drop, mulch, rocks, sand, and final touches for this year's theme "Tranquility" is very much appreciated.

Thank you to Lee for his labor of love in designing the display which is the most difficult aspect of the judging criteria. The display, plant selection and placement of the plant has to appeal to the judges.

Thank you goes out to Dianne Bennett, Perry Edge and Connie who helped hauling mulch, plants and doing all the behind the scenes work. Without everyone working as a team, we would not have had such a beautiful display!

Thank you also to Ray Hernandez, Perry Edge and Phil Stager who allowed the Society to use their plants for this event.

BUY THIS PRODUCT



GET THESE RESULTS



If you read no further, please heed the advice in the heading. *Bayer Advanced 3 in 1, Insect Disease & Mite Control* works minor miracles when it comes to keeping the garden mite free. As we croton aficionados know all too well, spider mites become very active in fall and keep feasting well into spring. For years, I tried various horticultural oils and other fairly reliable products such as *Malathion*, *Dursban* and *Diazinon*. While somewhat effective, the mites always seemed to reestablish themselves with ease. It seemed that these products had no long term affectivity. Even other “so called” systemics did not reliably keep these nearly microscopic pests in check. All of this changed with the introduction of *Bayer 3 in 1*.

Bayer Advanced 3 in 1, Insect Disease & Mite Control has a chemical composition consisting of .47% Imidacloprid 0.61% Taufluvinalinate and 0.65% Tebuconazole. Imidacloprid is manufactured by solely by Bayer Cropscience and appears in products such as *Admire™*, *Gaucho™*, *Merit™*, *Confidor™* and *Prothor™*. Target insects include sucking insects (e.g. [whiteflies](#), [leafhoppers](#), mealy bugs, grubs and [scales](#)). It has proven very effective in the fight against the fast spreading Asian Cycad Scale (*Aulacaspis yasumatsui*). This is the scale that has been decimating the Sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*) across Florida landscapes for over a decade. Imidacloprid is also an active ingredient in the highly effective pet flea control product *Advantage™*. Taufluvinalinate is an insecticide used to control a broad range of pests including moths, aphids and leafhoppers.

This ingredient is the one primarily responsible for keeping the dreaded thrips and mites away from our crotons. Tebuconazole is an FDA approved fungicide used worldwide on more than 90 crops such as bananas, coffee, grapes, canola, peanuts, rice, soybeans and vegetables. In Floridian summers, this active ingredient is especially beneficial when late afternoon storms leave our ornamentals covered with overnight moisture.

In my own garden, I have been applying Bayer 3 in 1 every 6-8 weeks through a dial hose end sprayer. My crotons have never looked better than they do this spring and that includes the height of summers past. Because the product is a systemic, a thorough foliar rinse proves very effective. Plants that appear to have a more advanced infestation require a soil drench. This works equally well for plants in containers. I hope your results are as impressive as mine have been.

Ray Hernandez



2008 USF Spring Sale

Our Spring sale at USF grossed about half of the sales we normally have. A slow economy took its toll on all of the vendors this year. The society would like to thank Mark & Deirdre Peters for donating 30 three gallon plants for this event. The society appreciates the generosity of membership donations since 100% of the funds go into the treasury.
(Members left to right—Dianne Bennett, Terry Seeley and Connie Hoerstgen)



Blast from the past.....

Air Layering Scissors

Used by the earlier croton propagators, these scissors have a very unique design. Rounded out on the cutting end to make a perfect circle on a stem, this utensil also has special grooves above the handle to squeeze off the cambium layer, for a perfect air layering cut. No need to get Croton juice on your hands!



Bring on the sphagnum moss and the foil!!

Newsletter Articles

The Society needs your input and experiences with Crotons for our quarterly newsletter. Please submit articles to The Croton Society, P.O. Box 24892, Tampa, FL 33623-4892 by the following dates listed below:

July Newsletter, articles are needed by June 20th

September Newsletter, articles are needed by August 10th

December Newsletter, articles are needed by November 10th

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