



GUZMANIA

Guzmania is a genus of the subfamily Tillandsioideae. The genus is named after Spanish naturalist, Anastasio Guzman who died in 1807 whilst exploring the jungles of Ecuador. There are 214 accepted species and over 400 registered hybrids and cultivars. There are undoubtedly many hundreds more that have not been registered. Guzmanias are mainly epiphytes that range from the West Indies, southern Mexico, Central America, and through northern and western South America. There is even one species, *Guzmania monostachia*, native to swampy woods in southern Florida. They are found at altitudes of up to 11,483 ft in the Andean rainforests, but high altitude Guzmanias need cool temperatures and do not grow well in Florida.

Guzmanias are among the most popular of all bromeliads. Interior designers often choose Guzmania hybrids with spectacular tall inflorescences to add a splash of bright color to the neutral hues popular in contemporary interiors. They are used extensively for interiorscaping office building lobbies, airport terminals and malls. The modern hybrids come in every shade of red, orange and yellow imaginable, plus many shades of white, pink and purplish colors. These hybrids are hardier indoors than most Guzmania species and often remain in good color for over a month despite dry air conditioning and weak fluorescent lighting. They have been bred over many generations to be enjoyed indoors. When placed outdoors in humid Florida, the inflorescences can last several months, especially during the cooler periods of the year. And, they have no spines to scratch people.

There are also many species grown by hobbyists who specialize in them. They come in a huge range of sizes with blooms that may be sunk down in the center almost like a Neoregelia, and blooms that are branched spikes reminiscent of some Aechmeas. Some have foliage that turns bright red at bloom time, and others may have exotic markings like hieroglyphs. Guzmanias prefer lower light levels, 60-75% shade. Dappled shade is great for them and they can take early morning sun for a short period. Guzmanias hold some water in their leaves, but most do not form cups that hold a lot of water. In their native areas rainfall is frequent and humidity is high even during brief dry spells. They like to be in a moist, open potting mix that is not allowed to dry out. They are truly tropical and prefer stable environments. Even the ones from cool mountain ranges do not do well when exposed to cold. They need protection from frost and freezes. Fertilize at half-strength as generally recommended for bromeliads, but they will respond to more frequent fertilization, even weekly or alternate weeks.

Of all the many Guzmanias, however, it is the modern hybrids that get everyone's attention. Despite being selectively bred for people to enjoy indoors, the hybrid Guzmanias frustrate many new growers. After their bloom loses color, they are not well-adapted to growing indoors where it is usually too dry and too dark for them to do well. Enjoy the beautiful bloom as you would a flower bouquet, and then grow the plant in moderate shade in the humid outdoors. A screened porch can be perfect for them. The warm, humid Florida environment is what the pups need to thrive. Another issue is the potting medium in which Guzmanias are commercially produced. They are often in 100% peat. This is a great medium for retaining moisture while the plant gets neglected indoors, but it often becomes too soggy if the plant is over-watered or placed where it is regularly rained upon. Then the plant may rot off at the base. Commercial growers are attentive to maintaining moisture without letting the peat become soggy. Do likewise. If the pot is placed in a decorative cache pot for indoor enjoyment, do not let the plant stand in water in the cache pot. This will result in the roots rotting. Empty any extra water out of the pot, but be sure there is water in the foliage. When the pups are large enough to remove, pot them in a standard fast-draining mix as generally recommended for bromeliads. Take care to keep the mix moist. If you tend to overlook watering, you may need to add some extra peat to your mix so it holds moisture longer. Guzmanias should never dry out completely. Re-blooming your Guzmania requires a little effort. For most bromeliads it is generally suggested that pups be removed when about one-quarter to one-third the size of the parent plant. For the modern Guzmania hybrids, better results are obtained if the pups are not removed until one-third to one-half the size of the parent. Because commercially produced Guzmanias are artificially induced to bloom, commercial growers can get a strong pup to become a mature blooming specimen in 18 months, or even less. Left to bloom naturally, it is common for Guzmanias to take two or three years to bloom, sometimes longer. Be patient. Give your plant good light; keep it moist, not soggy; and provide frequent light fertilizations. Then you can have your own spectacular tower of color rise from the lush green foliage of your Guzmania.