



VRIESEA

Vriesea is a genus of the subfamily Tillandsioideae with 231 accepted species. There are nearly 2,000 registered hybrids and cultivars, and many that are not registered. Its species are widespread over Mexico, Central America, South America and the West Indies, where they mainly grow as epiphytes in trees, but also on the rock faces of cliffs and bluffs. These aristocrats of the Bromeliaceae come small and huge. The most beautifully colored inflorescences are found among those that have plain green foliage, while others have exotically patterned and colorful foliage with flower spikes that are more weird than beautiful. All Vrieseas have spineless foliage.

The Vrieseas are very closely related to Tillandsias. They tend to have shallow root systems and should be ‘under-potted’ to avoid too much moisture around the roots. Most do well mounted, but are slow to attach themselves to a branch or plaque. Dry conditions are tolerated better than wet, but surrounding air should be moist. A fast-draining potting mix of the sort typically recommended for bromeliads should be used. If it remains wet in your growing conditions, consider a mix that is two-thirds bark and one-third soil-less potting mix. Some growers raise their Vrieseas in a mix of only bark and lava rock.

For the green-leaved Vrieseas, moderate shade is preferred. Light in the range of 60-70% shade is excellent, as is dappled shade. Vrieseas can survive in deeper shade, but will not thrive. For the ones with heavily patterned and colorful foliage, such as *V. fosteriana* and its many hybrids, brighter light encourages the best color. However, full direct Florida sun will scorch the leaves. If you believe your Vriesea needs more light, make the change gradually. A plant raised in shadier conditions has to be acclimated slowly to brighter conditions.

Vrieseas do not need a large amount of fertilizer, but they do benefit from light fertilization on a regular basis. A time-release granular fertilizer can be lightly sprinkled on the surface of the potting mix, but if your Vriesea is not fully rooted, a foliar spray is best. Use 1/2 to 1/4 of the recommended strength and spray the foliage lightly. There is no need to fully wet the foliage or drench the plant and do not fill the center of the plant with the fertilizer solution. It may burn or kill the central growth point. A very light spray weekly would be best, but most people are pleased with the results from a light spray about once per month. Too much fertilizer makes the plants “leggy” and causes the foliage to become more green rather than colorful.

Vrieseas have a rosette of overlapping leaves that retain water in the center. It should be kept full of water. Vrieseas prefer rainwater, but tap water is fine unless excessively hard or salty. It is a good idea to empty or flush the center of the plant occasionally and refill with fresh water. Keep the potting mix slightly moist, but never soggy wet. If in doubt, put water in the center and let the potting mix go dry between waterings. A soggy potting mix promotes rot. In Nature, the Vrieseas have their roots attached to the bark of tree trunks and the rock faces of cliffs, not in a wet potting mix. They are grown in pots for the convenience of people, not because they need a pot.