



NEOREGELIA

Neoregelia is a genus of the subfamily Bromelioideae. There are 113 accepted species and nearly 8,000 registered hybrids and cultivars. They are native to South American rainforests and coastal regions, mainly in eastern and southeastern Brazil in the Atlantic forest regions where they grow as epiphytes and terrestrials. They range from giants, like *N. johannis*, some of which can reach over a meter across and hold a gallon or more of water, to little thimble-sized *N. lilliputiana*. Whether the particular species is like a birdbath or an upright funnel in shape, all form a rosette of leaves holding water. When they bloom, the flowers remain down in the center, opening just above the water level like small blue or white waterlilies. The trait that makes Neoregelias so popular with the public and

hybridizers is the beautiful foliage. They come in a wide range of colors and can have stripes the length of the leaves, or bars across each leaf in contrasting colors. Some are spotted. Some are mottled. White, pink and red variegation can further enhance the patterns and colors. All the species have spines. Some have very small spines; and some huge spines that are part of their attraction.

The color and overall appearance of a Neoregelia is highly dependent on where and how it is grown. Offsets from the same plant, grown by two different people in different areas, can mature with only a vague resemblance to one another. The intensity and duration of light, amount and frequency of fertilization and pot size can make a world of difference in the finished plant. Most do best when underpotted, underfed, grown on the dry side (but always with water in the center), and given as much strong light as they can endure without bleaching. A few can take full sun, but the vast majority look their best when grown in 50-60% shade.

Neoregelias do well in any airy, well-draining potting mix. Many growers use a mix of equal parts of (1) pine bark nuggets, (2) perlite and (3) a commercial soil-less potting mix. Any similarly open and fast draining mix will do fine. The pot does not need to be any larger than what it takes for the plant to stay upright. Crowded roots are not an issue. The reason it is recommended that the pot be on the small side is that avoids having them too wet. Keeping the potting mix slightly moist at all times would be perfect, but hard to accomplish. If it is not dry to the touch, just water the center of the plant.

For colorful foliage, it is very important that Neoregelias receive only a light fertilization. Whether you use time-release granules or a liquid spray, use only a little. It goes a long way, and too much can result in the foliage losing color and the plant becoming poorly shaped. If you want your Neo to grow larger, faster, do not increase the amount of fertilizer you give. Instead, increase the frequency. If monthly does not result in fast enough growth, try alternate weeks. Some growers find it important for variegated Neoregelias to receive regular fertilization to compensate for there being less leaf surface area engaged in photosynthesis.

Probably the most important factor in people becoming dissatisfied with their Neoregelias is light exposure and duration. Filtered sun that is about half the intensity of full sun, all through the day, brings out the bright colors. If you can provide such light for only a part of the day, try a spot where the plant will receive some direct early morning sun. When moving a Neo to brighter conditions, make the move gradually so the plant can acclimate to the higher light intensity. It is receiving too much light if the leaves start yellowing or “bleaching”.

Neos do well outdoors, but can pick up a lot of leaves & debris which makes them un-sightly. The debris can be washed out of the rosettes with a gentle stream from a hose.

After blooming, pups are produced. Some Neos produce pups at the end of long stolons that stretch away from the mother. There is no need to remove these pups unless you do not want the spreading habit. Most produce their pups at the base of the mother plant. To have the symmetrical rosettes most enjoy, the offsets should be removed when about a quarter to a third of the size of the parent. Some growers have best success by leaving the offsets upright in an empty pot for a few days to “harden off” before potting, but keep water in the cup.

The Neoregelias give more satisfaction with less work than many other bromeliads. Beautifully colorful with less work explains why Neoregelias are the most popular bromeliad in Florida.