



## DYCKIA & HECHTIA

These are two different genera, both in the bromeliad subfamily Pitcairnioideae. They are often grown side by side because both like lots of sun, but they are otherwise very different in their needs. Dyckia grow in rocky, sunny areas, but where water is readily available to their roots. They are endemic to semi-arid regions of Brazil and the central part of South America, but they are not the xerographic desert plants many people assume them to be. They colonize where crevices in rock allow their roots to reach water. They have a natural tendency to clump, leading to thick, large mats. There are 178 accepted species of Dyckia and nearly 400 registered hybrids. All are terrestrial plants, and all but a few are very spiny. The spines are often a major part of their beauty. Some Dyckias

have plain green leaves, others are purplish red and some are so silvery they look metallic. The bloom spike appear from between the leaves laterally, not from the center. They often have colorful orange or yellow bell-shaped flowers. The overall look reminds some people of an Aloe... but a very spiny one.

Growing Dyckias successfully is very different from how one succeeds with most bromeliads. Instead of the typical fast-draining, open potting mix favored by most bromeliads, Dyckia do best in ordinary soil. They do not hold water in a cup. They should be watered regularly and not allowed to go completely dry. Avoid having the soil stay soggy, but if uncertain whether your Dyckia needs more water, give it some. Some growers even use shallow saucers under their pots to help keep the soil more moist. Also unlike other bromeliads, Dyckia do best when regularly fertilized and you can follow normal package directions. And, feel free to use a pot larger than seems proportionate to the plant. Dyckias have large root systems which they use to gather water and nutrient. They are happy when their roots can spread. You can grow your Dyckias like you would a cactus, except give them more water. Dyckias are fairly tolerant of cold weather, but should be protected from frost and hard freezes.

Hechtias are native from southern Texas thru Central America and are cold tender. There are 85 accepted species and about a dozen registered hybrids. They grow terrestrially in dry, rocky and cliff habitats. These are often arid and semi-arid. Regular soil or a mix designed for cactus works best. Some growers like to add a little dolomitic lime so the soil will not be acidic. (Most bromeliads prefer a moderately acidic medium.) Regular fertilization according to package directions works fine. Unlike Dyckias, the Hechtias are adapted to long periods of drought. They will grow best if watered when the soil goes dry, as you would grow a cactus. If in doubt, wait a day before watering. Raise them in full sun and give them a large pot. Hechtias can become quite large and their root systems spread out.

An unusual trait of Hechtias is that the plants are either male or female (except for the species *H. gayorum*). To set seeds, both sexes are needed. Another curious trait is that old bloom spikes that look dried out can re-bloom a year or more after you thought it had finished. The flower spikes rise from between the leaves laterally, not from the center. A Hechtia plant can live to be decades old, and over the years will produce plenty of offsets, but not nearly as many as a Dyckia.