

No wonder the bromeliad is a favorite of hobbyists: it's exotic but almost foolproof. Dozens of varieties are available.

The secret is in the watering. Keep water in the center cup of the plant, and water lightly around the base once a week.

Bromeliad roots need little space, so the plants can be put in small clay pots that may seem out of proportion with the plant. Although they prefer osmunda or shredded tree fern, bromeliads also thrive in a mixture of fir bark, sphagnum moss, and commercial soil. Another mix that works well is half perlite and coarse sand with soil. The goal is good drainage.

Bromeliads prefer bright--not full--sun and can tolerate poor light. Direct sun will burn the foliage. But the stiffer the leaves, the more light they need.

Bromeliads produce new plants by suckers. The parent plant turns brown as it dies, and leaves can be peeled away. Divide the plant, potting offsets individually in three- or four-inch pots.