



ARIZONA-SONORA DESERT MUSEUM

PLANT CARE INFORMATION

CULTURE OF *Tillandsia* species IN THE DESERT

DESCRIPTION: Most bromeliads are epiphytes (they grow on trees or rocks) and are native to the New World wet tropics. Pineapple (which grows in the ground) and the Spanish moss of the Southern U.S. are familiar but atypical examples. Most kinds have rosettes of leaves which catch rain and hold the water for short dry spells. Most of the hundreds of species of *Tillandsias* are adapted to the dry tropics where there is a long rainless season, but always high humidity. These do not hold water in their centers, but instead have tough leathery leaves which may also be succulent. The plants are nearly or completely rootless; the leaves have taken over the job of water and nutrient absorption. These are for dedicated plant lovers who are willing to give them special treatment.

Tillandsia exserta grows in the Sonoran Desert near Guaymas, which receives only 5 inches of rain per year, all in summer. The plants grow on the outer branches of shrubs and cacti, often in full sun. In southern Arizona the air is much drier, so this plant must be grown in a greenhouse or, if outdoors, protected from wind and watered frequently (whenever not visibly wet). It is not recommended as a houseplant, because the indoor environment is dry, stagnant, and either too dark or too hot if in a sunny window.

CULTURE:



Hardiness: It will tolerate cold temperatures, but not frost.



Sun tolerance: High light intensity. At least 50% to almost full sun.



Watering and feeding: High humidity (i.e. a greenhouse), **or** almost daily watering. Growth will be better if the plant is sprayed with a dilute complete fertilizer monthly. Ample air circulation is critical.



Pruning: Prune finished flower stalks, or entire flowered rosette, restarting the pups.