

Oh, for a muse, a shovel and a compost pile

By SAM HODGES
The Orlando Sentinel

Recycling gives you a good warm feeling, like on Sunday afternoon when you visit somebody in the hospital for five minutes then reward yourself by going to a two-hour, R-rated matinee full of gratuitous partial nudity.

It's easy, recycling. You just place glass and cans and newspapers into recycling bins rather than the trash, then take the bin out to the curb once a week.

People can see you're an environmentalist, a friend of the Earth. They can also see how many beers you drink. If you forget to recycle one week, you've got twice as many beer cans to put out by the curb. Neighbors begin praying for your recovery. Church deacons drop by with thermoses of hot coffee.

My career as an environmentalist began two years ago with recycling. It felt great at first, then merely good, then just pretty good. A few months ago I noticed I no longer got anything like the environmental "high" I got when I started.

Obviously I needed some new and more virtuous habit. Something with more of a kick. Something — dare I say it? — earthier than recycling.

Fearful, and at the same time strangely excited, I began composting.

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Composting sounds like something farmers in our families used to do, when our families had farmers. These days, though, composting is increasingly the environmental activity of choice for suburbanites and even city slickers.

With composting, you go beyond the fairly clean work of recycling. You get dirt and worse (congealed salad) under your fingernails. You handle coffee grinds, bruised banana peels, cat food so hard the cat won't eat it, and those elusive last two or three Cheerios. You rake fronds and gather lawn clippings. You might, if you're serious enough, find local sources of horse and cow manure.

When you compost, you put the aforementioned organic matter into a large outdoor container and shovel on more fronds and soil and maybe a little store-bought fertilizer. You water the mess a little, and turn it every few days. After a couple of months the material decomposes into compost, a super-rich fertilizer for the lawn or garden.

Composting makes you feel better than recycling because it's better for the environment. Like recycling it keeps material out of already teeming landfills. Unlike recycling, it also enriches the soil. Compost is "food for worms," as Shakespeare said, and when the worms eliminate the food — they do this safely out of sight — the compost is doubly organic, doubly rich.

Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer and writer, has the best line about composting, better even than Shakespeare's. It's in a short poem called *The Man Born to Farming*.

*He has seen the light lie down
in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.*

The line doesn't work quite as well when you replace "corn" with "Better Boy tomatoes," which is what I grow. Still, it's a great line.

The only trouble with composting ("dung heaping" if you're a poet) is that you don't usually do it out by the curb, where people can see how virtuous you are.



ABOVE: Cindy Laroche arranges a group of cryptanthus. BELOW: Bright colors add to the plants' charm. Staff photos/JACKIE

Earth Stars

By JOAN BROOKWELL
Home & Garden Editor

What do you call a plant that changes so completely with its environment that two of them, exactly the same species but growing in different places, look nothing at all alike?

Or, when it's growing on the side of a mountain, may bear offshoots that are almost round, allowing them to roll downhill and start a new colony some distance away?

You could call it an earth star. Or, if you want to get it just right, a cryptanthus.

These star-shaped little bromeliads come only from a small area of Brazil, mainly the southeast region. How many kinds there are is debatable, perhaps 50 species and forms, and "tons and tons of hybrids," according to grower John Laroche.

Laroche and his wife, Cindy, are the owners of a small nursery in North Miami Beach called The Bromeliad Tree. They specialize in cryptanthus and other bromeliads and have branched out into other plants such as aroids and hoyas. They change their specialty every couple of years not, as John jokes, because of his short attention span, but to grow and sell what is currently popular.

There's no big market in South Florida for cryptanthus, he says, because they

are mainly container plants, too small and too low-growing to make much of an impact in a landscape.

Nevertheless, they are popular window sill plants up North, and the Laroche do a healthy mail-order business in them.

Most cryptanthus are flat and star-shaped, ranging in size from 4 inches to 3 feet across, although they rarely grow that large. One species grows tall and

■ How to care for a cryptanthus and its pups. **4E**

spiky, up to 2½ feet in height, while another is a clumping plant with long stems.

Generally, however, cryptanthus are small and grow in the ground, occasionally on rocks, but never in trees, where so many other bromeliads are found. Their habitat ranges from open, partly deciduous forest to hot, dry sandy areas. Only a few are rain-forest plants; some make their home along the sides of waterfalls.

What makes cryptanthus so irresistible is their wild colors and patterns: red, green, pink, white, peach, cream, maroon, black, silver, gray and bronze, all dressed up with stripes, bars and spots. A plant may be solid, bright pink, or gray and black, or striped in red,



Cryptanthus has a chameleonlike charm — as its myriad colorful hybrids can testify.



Cindy and John Laroche specialize in cryptanthus at their nursery, The Bromeliad Tree, in North Miami Beach.

LIFESTYLE

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HOME & GARDEN

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Staff photos/JACKIE BELL

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Earth Stars



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SHOW & SALE

You'll find cryptanthus and many other bromeliads at "Bromeliad-venture," the annual show and sale of the Bromeliad Society of Broward County. It is scheduled from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 1 and 2 at Deicke Auditorium, 5801 Cypress Road, Plantation.

Anyone wishing to enter bromeliads in competition, either as horticultural or artistic entries, may bring them to the auditorium between 8 and 11 a.m. May 31. Awards will include the Bromeliad Society's top prize for horticulture, the Morris H. Hobbs artistic award and Cryptanthus Society awards for the best hybrid and best species.

Commercial growers and hobbyists will have bromeliad plants for sale.

Demonstrations are planned during the show, along with entertainment, including pianist Louis Daigle, former Dade County Cooperative Extension agent. There is no admission charge.



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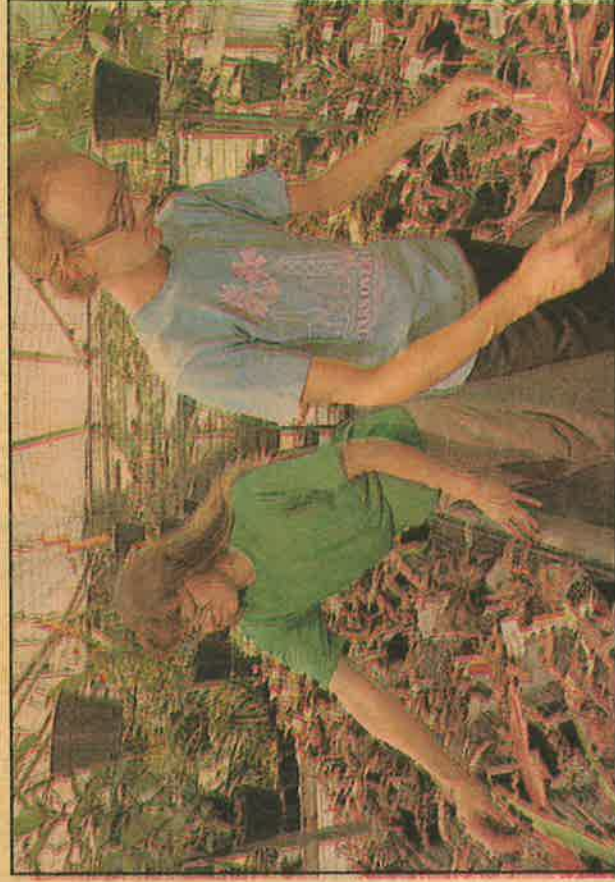
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SEE BROMELIADS /4E



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The quest for true brew consumes coffee lovers

By ARLINE BLEECKER

Special to the Sun-Sentinel

When Angelica Kofler moved to Boca Raton from her native Austria, she brought along an enduring Viennese appreciation for coffee.

"There's a difference between good coffee and American coffee," says Kofler, who prefers espresso's strength and skips after-dinner coffee when a restaurant doesn't serve it. To get what she wants, she makes it at home in her favorite espresso coffee maker from Italy.

To some, making coffee is a simple art. All methods are basically the same, says Kenneth Davids in his book, *Coffee*: "No matter what, you soak it until it tastes good and then drink it."

To others, like Kofler, it's not coffee unless it's made a certain way. Perhaps this accounts for the staggering array of coffee

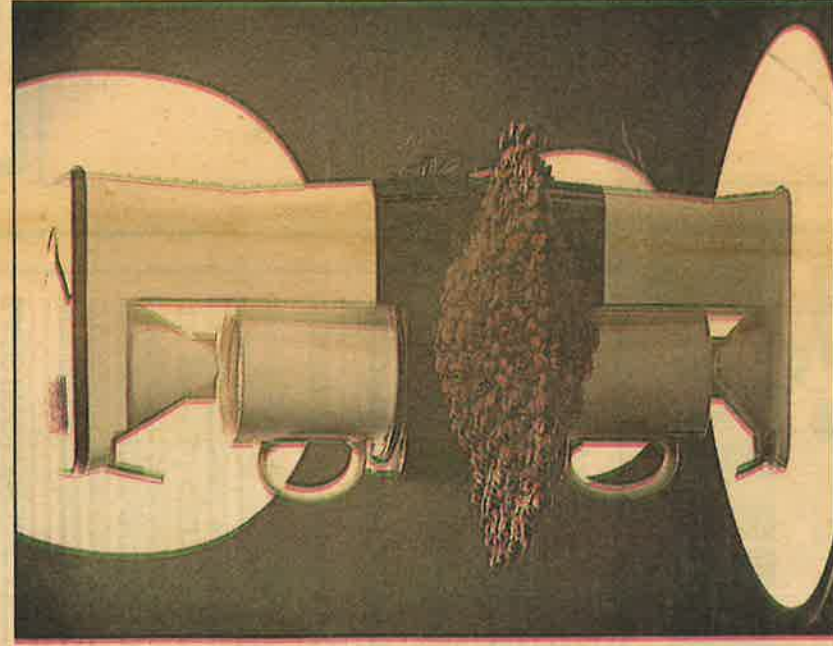
makers and pots on the market. But choosing one is not only a matter of taste, but also of convenience and money.

"The key difference is extraction time," says Michael Abate, manager at Barnie's Coffee and Tea Co. in Pompano Beach. "Each method changes the flavor of coffee."

Standard coffee makers use three brewing methods: drip, percolator and steep. Espresso makers use a steam process; the Turkish, *ibrik*, a boil-and-settle method. You can judge a pot by how hot it makes the water, how the water gets to the coffee and how it separates spent grounds from brewed coffee.

Robert DeChillo of the National Coffee Association, a trade organization whose members handle about 90 percent of all coffees imported to the United States, recommends the drip method: "It obtains the proper extraction — passes water through a bed of grounds once, which is sufficient to obtain the right percentage of soluble extraction."

SEE COFFEE /5E



Coffee maker/Service Merchandise

Staff photo/SEAN DOUGHERTY

The electric drip method accounts for 95 percent of coffee pots sold in the United States.

Coffee was first cultivated in Africa more than 1,000 years ago.

Earliest coffee enthusiasts ate whole coffee beans instead of brewing them. Then they threw some fresh beans into boiling water, and presto! Java. Today, coffee making — and makers — are a little more complicated.