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EDITOR: Evan Bartholomew, 13-3588 Moku St., Pahoehoe, HI, 96778, USA

email contact information: editor@bsi.org

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Front Cover: *Tillandsia* 'Samantha', photo by Pamela Koide-Hyatt. Story on pg. 90



Back Cover: Close-up, *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' in grex, photo Pamela Koide-Hyatt. Story on pg. 90

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Tillandsia 'Samantha'

Geoff Lawn, BSI Cultivar Registrar &
 Pamela Koide-Hyatt, Bird Rock Tropicals



Figure 1. *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' grex, photo by Pamela Koide-Hyatt

Recently BSI member Don Billington of Liverpool, England requested some background information about his *Tillandsia* 'Samantha', which he intended to enter into the world-famous, imminent Chelsea Flower Show 2012 in London. This cultivar name was not in the BCR and after several enquiries drew a blank, I googled the name online. At least 5 European-based websites featured this tillandsia with photos and some details about its commercial release, distribution, parentage and breeding.

These facts lead to the breeder Pamela Koide-Hyatt of Bird Rock Tropicals nursery, in Encinitas, California, who tells her story from here.

"This cultivar is a cross of 2 species which I collected in western Mexico in the early 1980's. The pollen parent is *T. kalmbacheri* from the State of Michoacan. The seed parent is *T. mooreana* from the State of Jalisco. I made the cross in 1989 and harvested the seeds in August, 1991. The progeny show intermediate characteristics of the parents.

This pollen parent *T. kalmbacheri* (Michoacan form) is not a very large plant, compared to the form from Oaxaca. The Oaxacan form in bloom stands 4-6 feet tall (120-180cms.) with a very elongated inflorescence, plus a rosette diameter of



Figure 2. *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' at Deroose Plants Collection house, Belgium

over 3 feet (1 metre). This smaller Michoacan form has a more digitate inflorescence and when blooming is closer to 2 feet (60cms.) high. Flower petals of both forms are light yellow. The primary bracts blush pink and spikes are full and pale green. The foliage is grey-green and lepidote.

The seed parent, *T. mooreana* (Jalisco) has very dark green, shiny foliage. The leaf texture is thin and the rosette leaves curl back towards the base of the plant. Near anthesis, the foliage changes to pink and red. The inflorescence is tall, blooming up to 4 feet (120cms.). Primary bracts can show some pink or red, but will fade back to green. The bracts are not as wide as those of *T. kalmbacheri*. The *T. mooreana* has many more lateral spike branches and purple flower petals.

It took me over 10 years to grow these progeny to blooming size, which occurs in Spring/Summer (Figure 1). The foliage is wide like *T. kalmbacheri* but glossy, dark green like *T. mooreana*. The inflorescence spikes and primary bracts are like *T. kalmbacheri*, but there are more of them and much taller, similar to *T. mooreana*. It is really the best of both parents. Like so many of my primary *Tillandsia* hybrids, this cultivar is intermediate between the 2 species. Of the plants that I bloomed, several showed some pink in the foliage, but that depended on controlling the feeding and providing sufficient light. The spikes hold color for a long time, more than 6 months. The flower petals are pale yellow.

In December, 2003 Reginald Deroose, from Deroose Plants in Belgium acquired a plant from me. He was successful in tissue-culturing the clone en masse (Figure 2) and introduced it to commercial growers in 2010, with the first batches released retail in January, 2011. The primary market at this time is Europe, but some have been sold in the U.S.A. and China. Grex siblings I retained at Bird Rock Tropicals are virtually identical to the Samantha clone, although the primary bracts of several clones may be a brighter pink under my strong light in southern California. Buyers should note that plants sold under my stock number "TX196 *T. mooreana*(Jal) x *kalmbacheri* (Mich)" should now be labelled the registered name of *T. 'Samantha'*. "

The chosen name of Samantha honours the daughter of one of the leading European distributors. The good news is that Don Billington's 2012 RHS Chelsea Flower Show display entry of bromeliads, size 4 metres x 4 metres which included



Figure 3. *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' Chelsea Flower Show 2012, bromeliad display entry, Photo Don Billington

a group of 5 *Tillandsia* 'Samantha', went on to win a Gold Medal for his 'Every Picture Tells a Story' Nursery at their first attempt (Figure 3).

Tillandsia 'Samantha' was entered also into competition for the Chelsea Flower Show 'Plant of the Year' 2012 (Figure 4). This new category was created in 2009 and is only eligible to plants which have not been seen at a flower show before. The Royal Horticultural Society Committee chooses a short list of twenty finalists, which this year included *Tillandsia* 'Samantha'. The finalists are presented to the members of the R.H.S. specialist plant committees by the nursery or breeder who is introducing the plant. There is a committee vote and the 'Plant of the Year' is declared. Word spreads quickly around the world and as with both present and past winners, success inspires a dramatic boost in sales, also even among plants which do not win.

Tillandsia 'Samantha' was displayed with the other nineteen finalists for 'Plant of the Year' in the Great Pavillion and generated a lot of interest and promotion during the week in Chelsea. Bromeliads, let alone Tillandsias have seldom reached the highest award level at this highly-competitive world-class event. In barely 18 months since its commercial release abroad, *Tillandsia* 'Samantha' has truly earned the title of International Traveler.



Figure 4. *Tillandsia 'Samantha'*, Finalist entry, Chelsea Flower Show, Photo Don Billington

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